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LEFT BY

GEORGE PUTNAM METCALF AND MARGARET CARTER METCALF

WHO WERE FRIENDS OF
THE SAINT PAUL ACADEMY
COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL
FROM ITS BEGINNING
IN 1914

THEIR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN, WHO WERE STUDENTS HERE,
MADE THIS PRESENTATION IN 1958

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THE ARMY WITH BANNERS

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THE ARMY WITH BANNERS

A Divine Comedy of This Very Day, in Five Acts, Scene Individable, Setting Forth the Story of a Morning in the Early Millennium

BY

CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

> Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners?
>
> SONG OF SOLOMON

NEW YORK
B. W. HUEBSCH
MCMXIX

8927

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BY CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO

M. F. B.

"YOU ARE THE FLOWER AND
LOVELINESS OF ALL THE
BLOSSOMING MAYS!"

"The Army with Banners" was written during the summer of 1917; and produced at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, New York City, on April 9th, 1918.

THE SCENE

THE SCENE is the HALL of a Gothic Building of the thirteenth century, formerly a nunnery, now converted into an Orphanage. Below, it is bathed in clear but sunless daylight: the vaultings above, losing themselves in palpitating shadows.

On the left is a large Mullioned Window, looking East.

At the back are two pointed Doors. The westerly one leads to the Scullery and Kitchens: the easterly, to the Refectory. Between them, a broad stone Stairway ascends to a Gallery, dominated by a lofty Stained Glass Window, representing the Angel of the Resurrection in sombre amber lights. Exits may be made from both sides of the gallery.

On the right is a gaunt Fireplace, the fire being lighted.

A Lectern, guarded by two tall Candelabra and provided with a Bible, stands by the eastern pillar of the stairway. Of other furniture, there is little. A carved Table in the window: upon it, an Alms-dish and a Bowl of Roses. A Chair near the middle of the Hall. Above the fireplace, a High-backed Bench: below it, a Faldstool. All of these are in strict thirteenth century. Only one really modern note may be found in the place. It stands by the western pillar of the stairway, opposite the Bible. It is a Talking Machine.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MARY BLISS, *A Poor Fool*
JULIA MANNERS, *A Lady of Good Motives*
JOB LIMP, *A Man of the Past*
TIMOTHY HODGE, *A Man of the Present*
TOMMY TRAIL, *A Man of the Minute*
POMEROY WRAGG, *A Man of Almost any Time*
DAFTY, *A Man Out of Time Altogether*

THE PLACE

An Orphanage

THE TIME

At the Coming of the Lord

THE ARMY WITH BANNERS

THE FIRST ACT

As the Curtain rises, the Hall is empty. The laughter of children sounds from a distant part of the Orphanage. A clock strikes nine, and silence ensues.

The two doors fly open simultaneously. TIMOTHY HODGE *appears from the Refectory: from the Scullery,* JOB LIMP. TIMOTHY *is corpulent and pasty, with red hair and an acquiescent smirk:* JOB, *scrag with a bitter eye. They are dressed accordingly; and belong in their respective ways to the loftier classes.*

They hurry forward, and bump in the middle of the Hall.

LIMP. Extravagance! Did *you* find anything?

HODGE. The entire Orphanage got up like one of them Catholic carnivals. Advent Sunday, they said. And the kids all coming in from Mass.

Mass, mind you! And then we call ourselves a decent protestant country.

LIMP. It's this everlasting pampering.

HODGE. It's popery.

LIMP. The woman's a fool. And *he's* the devil himself.

He gestures savagely towards the Scullery.

Did you see her?

HODGE. What! Let her nab hold of me alone, before you others. . . . Not much! You know what she is.

This provokes LIMP *to a bitter snort.*

Course, I believe in the higher education, myself. Didn't I build the Baptist Young People's Self-Improvement Institution? Only, it don't all seem proper to me, somehow. Did you see *him?*

LIMP. Him! He's off gallivanting with the little girls. But his hoofprint's everywhere. I thought that cryptic paranoiac was engaged to shovel coal!

HODGE (*quoting*). *Stoke the furnace, and do what's wanted down below.* I was by, when she made the contract. And too well paid at that.

LIMP. Well, he's cook now! That, added to the rest of the tomfooleries. Made them cakes!

HODGE. Seems sinful, don't it? And all this want in the world. Good cakes, as might have been given to the poor. The deserving poor.

LIMP *grunts aggrievedly.*

It's not even as if they paid their whack. After all, it's a charity, and ought to be run as such. But she never would listen to me.

LIMP. There was one, a mountainous macaroon with a slab of ice on it . . . I can see it now. Ugh! And me with a liver.

HODGE. Awful!

LIMP. Awful! It's torments of the damned! . . . Did I ever tell you about my liver, Timothy?

HODGE. You did, Job. Reglar, the last seven years.

And he eyes him firmly.

Funny thing, never had a liver. But we all have our troubles. Mine's fatty degeneration of the heart. Doctor says I'll go, that way, sometime.

This does not really comfort JOB. *He moves irritably to the fireplace.*

LIMP. I wish you wouldn't be forever contemplating tombs.

HODGE. We got to die, Job.

LIMP (*sneering*). There is no death! Ask *her.*

HODGE. *I* ain't responsible for her profanity. You'd better blame that window. That's what's addled *her* brain. Twisting Scripture!

He turns reproachfully towards the window.

Don't look like no Angel of the Resurrection, neither. Looks to me, more like one of them new-fangled cover designs.

He straddles the chair and faces LIMP, *who has his back to the fire.*

It's all this thirteenth century falderal. Moment Nicholas Biggs left her the money, I knew what it would be. I did *my* best. But no! *Orphanage!* So she buys this ramshackle old has-been. If she'd invested in my Lucifer Power and Light Company, as you others did, by today she'd have been a Rockyfeller. I

don't recall the exact present market-price of Gothic nunneries; but *you* know what Lucifers been doing since the war. Besides the patriotism! Investing with me would have served the two most improving principles of the hour: Business As Usual and Doing Your Bit.

He bites his knuckle meditatively. The action points to an acquisitive infancy.

LIMP. If she'd only had the taste to make it a museum!

HODGE. Or else the gumption to run it as a ruin. Simply wanted a turnstile and a man at fifteen per. No! *Education! Let us resume from where we halted in thirteen something!* Course, education's — needed. My young Baptists now, I suppose you'd call them educated. They don't dance, they don't drink, they don't go to theaytres, don't do anything! — What more do you want? And I make out of it! . . .

He discovers a nice wart behind his ear.

If the place paid! If it was only one of them high-priced schools, where the little girls run around in automobiles and the little boys play golf all day! But orphans! *Penniless* orphans! Not even orphans, some of them!

There are children in this establishment today, who have healthy well-fed parents walking the earth. I taxed her with that once. Know what she said? *They'll all be walking, presently.* That was the very first time I noticed, she was going peculiar in her head.

LIMP. Peculiar! It's dementia praecox!

HODGE. Then, the things she's teaching them! My young people would be shocked. Forms and ceremonies, and play-acting and sex hygiene, you'd think they was so many grown-up married men and women, the unpleasant things they know. Have you seen their Greek dancing? — I have! And they do it openly, brazenly! I don't know how you think; but I know how I was brought up to consider little girls' legs. And of course, since he's come . . .!
I may be only a plain God-fearing man of business; but I hope I represent the spirit of an enlightened protestant age. And I tell you, it hurts my inside, to see so much good money, sort of — getting away.

And he is back at his mouth once more.

LIMP. It isn't the thirteenth century. It's this modern —— levelling. Socialism! And humouring indigent brats with macaroons.

HODGE. I'm against socialism, myself. It destroys incentive.

LIMP. Mediaevalism's all right in its proper place: the past. Something to escape to, from the loathsome present. But why resuscitate it for a crèche of undiscerning sucklings? Can they grasp symbolism, grotesquerie, the gargoyle? Can they grasp the creative technicalities of such works as Dante's *Inferno?* No! I can. I've a liver.

And he indicates that organ, feelingly.

HODGE. You remind me of corpses. Some people would travel long weary miles for a corpse. I don't mean merely clergymen and undertakers. Grandmothers, aunts, next-door neighbours, people of that sort. My mother loved them. Course, corpses have their uses, same as — ourselves; but as you say, why resuscitate? End of the world and all that, yes! Only, I mean — actually. Nice lot of dummies we'd look, wouldn't we, if all the graveyards was suddenly to . . .

LIMP (*explosively*). Look here, Timothy! Do you propose chirruping your charnel fancies the whole morning?

Hodge regards him with melancholy displeasure.

HODGE. Ain't you got *no* higher nature, Job? Don't be liverish. Have a heart.

He claps his hand rememberingly to his own. His intended diagnosis, however, is prevented by the tumultuous appearance of POMEROY WRAGG *from the Refectory. He is blown in, as it were, upon gales of childish glee.*

POMEROY *is a small old man, spick and span, now bespattered with confectionery. He is in funeral garb, wears national emblems in his lapel, and seems perturbed.*

WRAGG. The poisonous young reptiles! This comes of Magna Charta! This comes of granting popular liberties! Give them a taste of *genuine* feudalism, say I! Racks, tortures, thumbscrews! Look at me!

HODGE. Well, you do look a mug. What have they done?

WRAGG. Done! Plastered me up with cake and banana skin, and all the filthy leavings of their gluttonous young mouths.

LIMP. The little swine! Why?

WRAGG. Because, like a babbling bivalve, I cast my

pearls before them. *You* know my platform. *You* know the priceless gems I'm bawling night and day into the flapping ears of every ass I meet. I gave them all. And they plastered me with offal.

HODGE. Signifying disagreement?

WRAGG. Disagreement! Worse!

LIMP. Contempt?

WRAGG. Worse! They took me for a funny man, and hugged me!

The others reply incredulously:

BOTH. No! . . .

WRAGG. I tell you, they did! I can feel their sticky kisses all over me. Then they romped me up and down, and made me this disgusting mess. Dressed for the Memorial Service, too! If ever this leaks out, I'm lost. Let people once get it into their heads, I'm funny; and I shall perish from the earth. Look at me!

He gyrates. Upon his back is pinned a paper, bearing the legend in a large scrawling hand: MISTER WRAGG IS A WAGG.

HODGE (*laughing*). Well, that's funny!

WRAGG (*turning furiously*). What's funny?

LIMP (*testily*). On your back, man! On your back!

He unpins and gives him the paper.

WRAGG. That's that little devil in yellow, who wanted me to play pickaback! (*spitefully*); I suppose she thinks that's poetry!

HODGE. Here, save them pins. I wouldn't be the man I am today, if I hadn't saved pins.

LIMP *hands them to him. He sticks them lovingly in his waistcoat edge.*

WRAGG. This comes of helping friends! Pulling us out of our comfortable Sunday beds to play peepbo! Has anyone *seen* Julia? She planned this conspiracy.

HODGE. We ain't seen Julia, nor *her*. And we been poking about since eight. Job in the kitchen: me in the refectory.

LIMP. Picked up a few choice titbits, too! *I* did. I don't know what Timothy . . .

But TIMOTHY *muses upon some problem of his own.*

HODGE. Them poor-boxes in the refectory, as the kids put their pennies in, ain't no good. You can poke them out with your knife, as easy as easy.

WRAGG. Well, we must await Julia's pleasure; that's all!

LIMP. Yes, and supposing *she* turns up! Nice catastrophe *we'd* bring about, and no Julia behind us!

WRAGG. We must talk her down!

LIMP. Mary Bliss!

He glooms ironically, as Pluto might upon the bootless dreams of Sisyphos.

HODGE. Here's Julia.

JULIA MANNERS *trips briskly down the stairway. She is a widow of means, dressed elegantly but severely in plum-coloured silk.*

JULIA. Everybody here? Charming! Have they sent the talking machine? — We'll want that. Ah! Opposite the Bible! Most appropriate!

She joins them. They gather around her.

I've been up in her room, alone, rummaging through her things. Now, Job, don't get punctilious: our plot necessitates it. I will say one thing for her — she's orderly. You know, that crafty kind of orderliness, covering an oblique mind.

Have *you* obtained anything?

She happens to glance at HODGE, *who takes the enquiry personally;*

HODGE. Me? Nothing to speak of.

JULIA. *I have!* I've discovered everything. It confirms our vilest suspicions.

HODGE. About her?

LIMP. About him?

JULIA. About both of them. It's perfectly unspeakable: I'll tell you all about it at once. Let's sit down and be comfortable.

They do so. JULIA, *in the middle of the high-backed bench:* LIMP, *on her left.* WRAGG *takes the faldstool, below the fire.* HODGE, *the chair.*

LIMP. Looks as if we were going to get somewhere at last.

The others 'shush' him down.

JULIA. I always knew that Mary Bliss was a fool. Her educational theories prove that. And it was I, remember, first drew attention to her queer mental . . . Well, today's revelation caps everything! Though really, if I hadn't been a born innocent, I should have guessed that too! For all the town talks of it! . . . Listen! I've been reading her diary.

LIMP. What! . . .

JULIA. Yes, I'm aware it isn't done: you needn't tell me that! After all, it's the motive! . . . Look here, I can't proceed with my story, if you keep on impugning my honour in this ungentlemanly way. Timothy understands. Don't you, Tim?

HODGE (*complaisantly*). Oh, yes.

JULIA. There, you see! We can't stand selfishly by, and watch that creature pass to perdition, without *some* help. We must save her from herself: we're her friends. Well, *aren't* we?

OMNES (*vociferously*). Oh, yes! Yes!

JULIA. Then, doesn't that shew? As I say, it's the intention. Even God searches our hearts. Isn't that a kind of reading diaries?

And, divinely fortified, she drops to the confidential;

My dears, it's practically a confession. Every single wickedness set down in barefaced black and white. As for *him!* I had my misgivings before; but now I could tell you a pretty thing or two! The trickster has her completely under his thumb.

WRAGG. Dafty?

JULIA. Dafty.

HODGE. What's his real name, I wonder?

JULIA. Timothy, what *does* it matter? Who cares about the real name of a brute that stokes furnaces? Though no doubt he has diabolically deep reasons for concealment!

HODGE. It's that sleepy look of his! Sort of — crocodile.

JULIA. Sleepy! He's as wide awake as . . .

LIMP. Can't imagine what she sees in the scoundrel!

JULIA (*pityingly*). My dear Job! Don't you know, persons like Dafty only have to dress peculiarly, and cultivate a few eccentricities, for every mis-

guided woman in the world to jump at them? That's what they do: jump! The children, too. That little yellow thing especially.

HODGE. Course, it's plain, what he's after!

He taps his pocket. Coins are heard clinking.

JULIA. Precisely our motive for stepping in. Nicholas Biggs only left her the money in one of his cranks, ghastly old fiend! If her friends won't look after it, who will? It's our sacred duty! We owe it to the dead! She shall *not* squander it on worthless outsiders! Worming in!

HODGE. It's her immortal soul, I'm thinking of!

JULIA. Exactly! We must remember that, too. After all, if we do read diaries, we are bringing her the consolations of religion. Else, why did I send the talking machine?

LIMP. Well, why?

JULIA (*mysteriously*). I'm reserving that. Timothy, see if the record's there.

He rises heavily to do so; but WRAGG'S *next utterance diverts him.*

WRAGG. Queer old stick, Nicholas! Clever as the deuce! Billions, out of manufacturing optical instruments!

HODGE. Dead wrong! It was monster enterprise, bold investment, made him. Till he began smashing telescopes.

WRAGG. I never heard that.

HODGE. There's not many as knows. Kept dark! Business!

He compresses his lips with the profound inscrutability of the man of affairs. LIMP *soon pricks that bubble;*

LIMP. No mystery! Everybody knows it was religious mania! Runs through the whole family: either *her* way, or old Nick's! *She* flies off into erotic mysticism and esoteric orphanages: *he,* after a perfectly brilliant financial career, suddenly declares himself a damned spirit, hacks his observatory to smithereens, and goes gibbering into limbo under the hallucination that the sky is an Enormous Eye.

JULIA. Enormous. . . . How horrible!

WRAGG. Ever see him?

LIMP. Nobody did. But his influence was unfathomable. Wherever any scheming of transcendent magnitude was afoot, you might be sure, deep down, abysmally, under one pseudonym or another, old . . .

HODGE. Ssh! Dafty! . . .

This, he delivers in a stentorian stage whisper.

DAFTY *enters from the Scullery with a log. He is a quaint soul in goggles, shambling of gait and bent, a whimsical twinkle in his eye; and rather nobbishly clad in buff nankeens with buttoned gaiters and a brimstone vest.*

He places the log on the fire, beams affably upon the company, and remarks;

DAFTY. Weather, we're having! And thunder brewing!

They stiffen, making no reply. Nothing daunted, he tries a crack with WRAGG;

Fond of their bit of fun! That Golden One, now! Quite a poet, I must say. And only seven!

WRAGG *pokes vigorously at the fire.* DAFTY *watches amiably, with an air of heartening the well-meant bungling of an amateur. He then spreads further radiance, ostensibly addressing the Gothic arches above him.*

They enjoyed their macaroon. I must have that recorded in the diary.

The others focus LIMP and JULIA *in turn, as they register these trifles.*

And DAFTY *makes for his den. On his journey, he bethinks him of another word; and with a glint at* HODGE, *produces from his vest, a coin.*

Can any of you kind friends break me this?

HODGE *can. The others will see him in the nether gulf first.*

HODGE. I can give you pennies.

DAFTY. Thank you. Pennies will do nicely.

He regards him slumberously, an air of the Nile about him.

The transaction is made. HODGE *bites*

the silver to test it. He then tickles the crook of his mouth with his forefinger, making a secretive broker's jib. DAFTY *studies the action heedfully, and imitates it. This done, he shuffles towards the Scullery.*

But JULIA *can restrain herself no longer;*

JULIA. You! Stoker!

DAFTY. Ma'am?

And he pops his head round the back of the bench.

JULIA. Have you any earthly inkling of what decent godly people mean by morality?

DAFTY (*chuckling*). Bless your heart, yes, ma'am! Means making yourself disagreeable to the indecent devilish ones. Only, don't bother your head, ma'am: you get over it! I was moral myself once. But I learned a game worth dozens of it. I'll tell you all about it some day, when you and I . . . (*winking*); You know! Sweet by and bye!

JULIA. Thank you, I am not desirous of learning.

HODGE. I see what's wrong with this fellow. He's one of these word-cubists. You know, calls

black white; and twists things inside out. Job, you're a scholar: what's the name of that thing they do?

LIMP (*snapping*). Paradox!

HODGE. Thought so! You see, it'll be anarchy next, and free love, and got no religion.

DAFTY (*cunningly*). Yes, I have, too!

JULIA. You! Religious!

DAFTY. Yes, ma'am, damnably! Only, don't tell anybody. The moment you profess religion, you're put down for something serious at once; and all your little jokes go for nothing. I'm considered quite a funny man, so long as people don't imagine me religious. Only whack them over the back with a scourge: they split with laughter! — They never dream of apostolic function. Another thing! — Keeping mum staves off the saved. I've had whole Sunday Schools jigging around me, just because some busybody blurted. And it's useless informing them, their god's a Zulu's devil; and their revivalism stinks to heaven. They never see the joke. They yell out halleluiah, and take your name in vain, and pump you by the hand: till you wish yourself in hell, for a spice of solid home-comfort and congeniality. Mind

you, I believe God's love is infinite. There is salvation for all — even the saved; if only they'll repent, and demolish a few big tabernacles. Why, I knew a Methodist once, who had been saved fifteen times; but the Lord found him at last, and now he's quite an honest member of society — a low comedian.

Meantime, his hearers have risen to sublime aloofness. They would not hearken to the bellowings of Apollyon. Now, however, they begin to descend rapidly;

You see, it's all a matter of eyesight. You can't get good eyes out of bad spectacles. That master optician, my good friend, Roger Bacon, in this very thirteenth century, knew that. Then again: take telescopes! An instrument can be made with power enough to reach beyond the stars. But it's no heavenly use to a blind man. He only has to learn that it exists, to be misled. Better smash it altogether and have done! You know those coloured flames and flickers, when you press your eyeballs? Well, his poor black mind gets lost in *them;* and he fancies he beholds the shining of the Seven Fiery Spirits that burn about the Great White Throne.

LIMP (*bitingly*). What do you know about it?

DAFTY (*seraphically*). Ah, that's the funniest joke of all. I have seen those Spirits.

JULIA. That's enough infidelity, stoker! You can go.

DAFTY (*ruefully*). Wish my jokes could! Seems to be no place for really delicate humour nowadays.

And he seeks the coaly comfort of his underworld.

Alone, at last, they let loose their pent-up feelings;

JULIA. And that's the influence, she deems desirable for children!

LIMP. If he'd only be contented with that Stygian pit, unto which it has pleased the Unknowable to call him! But he comes up! He gallivants! He cooks!

WRAGG. He plays the fiddle, while those young imps jig!

HODGE. I've seen him caper like an old he-goat, himself! He took off Satan in their pageant! Togged up and hollered like an actor!

LIMP. He makes them fireworks! They tell him all their beastly little secrets. He kisses the girls!

JULIA. And sows within their minds the tares of sin and irreligion!

HODGE. Something must be done!

WRAGG. Something drastic!

LIMP. Something excruciating!

HODGE. Something really nasty!

JULIA. Precisely! That's why we're here. Now, listen.

They bank their fires. They divine she has something subterranean to impart. She has.

We must try to save her first. It wouldn't be quite kind to condemn her, if we didn't try to save her first. *Then,* if she's obstinate — as she will be! — there's the diary. As I say, we're her friends, and have every right to behave as such. So that's settled. And we can begin saving.

I have everything ready. The talking machine, the hymn books, even the collection plate. And *he'll* be here within the hour.

OMNES. Who?

JULIA. Ah! . . .

She now springs her trump card.

Tommy Trail!

OMNES. *Who!* . . .

JULIA. Tommy Trail.

WRAGG. You'll never get him.

JULIA. I have.

HODGE. You're a miracle! Tommy demands gold-mines!

JULIA. He does. Then there was the bracelet for Mother, and Johnny's little diamond pin; but I thought if we all chipped in. . . . And it's really an investment, rightly considered. Besides saving her soul!

What do you say, Pomeroy? You've been speaking on the same platform with him lately.

WRAGG. I say, Tommy Trail is the biggest patriotic bonanza, booming today. That man, with a flag and a hymn, can do more for recruiting in four minutes, than the whole of Pentecost.

JULIA. What power! I do hope his voice . . .

WRAGG. That's no matter! When his voice croaks, he gets there with gesticulation. I've known him gnaw the pulpit before today.

JULIA. What inspiration!

WRAGG. *Doctrine*, a bit crude . . .

JULIA. Ah, but then he's so sincere!

LIMP. So's a homicidal maniac! American, isn't he?

WRAGG. Distinctly: representatively! Emerson was one sort. He's another.

LIMP. Well, he won't get anything out of me. I hate his methods.

JULIA. My dear Job, he reaches people you and I wouldn't touch! Really horrid low-class people, you know!

LIMP. Julia, his language! . . .

JULIA. How absurd you are! The man was brought up on a football field! You can't expect a man brought up on a football field, to talk like Ruskin!

LIMP. Yes, but his god — his disagreeable god! . . .

JULIA. Now, Job! You can't go judging everybody by his god! Do be charitable!

HODGE. Look at the theaytres he's closed! The good beer he's had wasted!

WRAGG. Look at that last sermon, *Render unto Cæsar!* Thousands rallied to the standard of civilization!

HODGE. And the one before, as broke the strike in my own industry! That was, *Suffer, little children.*

JULIA. Then his influence in the Happy Home! I know an auctioneer, a church deacon, who forsook his wife. Now, instead of playing cards with low companions, he sings hymns to *her.*

HODGE. In Tommy, you get all the high-class fun of Sarah Bernhardt and Charlie Chaplin knocked into one, without the wickedness. He's one of the elect all right, is Tommy! Oil of salvation regular oozes from him! The very unions believe and tremble when he comes! *He* makes the worker content with his wages! How? Offers the blighter heaven: if he refuses — gives him hell.

LIMP. Yes, hell and Tommy!

you, I believe God's love is infinite. There is salvation for all — even the saved; if only they'll repent, and demolish a few big tabernacles. Why, I knew a Methodist once, who had been saved fifteen times; but the Lord found him at last, and now he's quite an honest member of society — a low comedian.

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LIMP (*bitingly*). What do you know about it?

MISS BLISS *appears from the right, tottering down the stairway by aid of a cane. She is an old woman of seventy-five, dressed daintily in dove-grey with a white cashmere shawl and a chantilly lace cap. Her snowy hair is arranged in side curls close to the temples with combs. She wears gold spectacles; and carries over her arm a large work-bag, embroidered with a mediaeval device.*

They rise to meet her. She commences talking at the top of the stairs, and continues doing so, all the way down.

BLISS. Well, well, well! First Advent Sunday, with its blessed message of expectation! And now this beautiful unexpected visitation of nice kind friends. Well, well! And then they say there are no miracles! . . .
What is it? A symposium, or a conspiracy?

There is an awkward pause. Then JULIA *answers with effusive pleasantry.*

JULIA. Oh, a conspiracy, Miss Bliss!

BLISS. Well, well, that is as it should be. Conspiracy: a breathing together. It reminds me

of that Great Breathing, when . . . And even now, it may be — at almost any moment . . . Don't you feel something in the air? A kind of trembling!

She puts forth a quivering little palsied hand.

And then, my Angel! Is he not perhaps a trifle more golden?

She turns towards her beloved window.

HODGE. Well, I don't know as . . .

JULIA (*quickly*). Why, certainly! Distinctly yellower! (*Under her breath*) Old fool! . . . Let me help you, Miss Bliss.

And she juts out a succoring arm.

BLISS. No, no, thank you. I can do very nicely. Only, the stairs are just a wee mite steeper than . . .
Oh, but I must not say that! It is unbelieving.

By this time, she has joined them below.

So, here we all are! How radiant you appear! I cannot shake hands, because my poor old . . .

She flushes, and changes the subject quickly.

Oh, such a naughty old woman, I am! You look so good and sweet, you three boys, I'd like to kiss you! But I must behave: I have just come from Early Celebration. There! — Julia, for the company of you.

She kisses JULIA *with divine tenderness.* JULIA, *responding, pecks the air.*

I always did like kissing. It is such a pretty ceremony. Kind of a sacrament! Of course, there was Judas, poor thing; but He . . .
And the children are darlings! They have such little clean faces!

HODGE. Kissing ain't improper, when . . .

BLISS. Yes, I saw you, Timothy! But you really mustn't! She was the merriest maid I ever had.

Flabbergasted, he brings his fist down on the back of the chair. She mistakes his meaning.

No, I won't sit, thank you. They are awaiting my morning word. Stay the whole day, all of

you. There is to be Greek dancing. And at eleven o'clock, as it's Advent Sunday, they are donning their new white robes, and are to do their Pageant of the Second Coming. Dafty will play an archangel! Yes, is he not a genius? You will enjoy the dancing, Timothy. You always watch it so interestedly.

His expression escapes her, for she is busy bringing forth treasure from her workbag. It is a small white robe.

Look! The very last of all! I finished it this morning at my meditations. It is the Golden Child's. Hers had to be last, of course; because she is the firstling of my heart. And the first shall be last, you know.

WRAGG. Is that child, the little yellow . . .

JULIA. With the big eyes that . . .

HODGE. And the legs as . . .

BLISS (*radiant*). That's the one! — You see, they all know her. Such a frolicsome tot! She writes poetry, too. And her laughter! It is like the bark of a little happy dog! . . .
Oh, how remiss I am! Pomeroy, I never thanked you for the flag. He gave me a beautiful big flag for the chapel. I put it with all

the other flags, friends' and foes' alike, by the altar of our Lady of Mercy. They look so sweet and neighbourly there together.

WRAGG. You put our flag with the enemy's!

BLISS. Assuredly! They might not think we loved them, otherwise.
And do you see? These embroidered slits are for the wings.

LIMP. Humph!

JULIA. Er — wings? . . .

BLISS. Yes, when they come, you know. Oh, I tell you, that is the most important point of all. Dafty examines her tiny shoulder blades every morning, to see whether the pin feathers are shewing. And look at this. A little Golden Heart, for Him to know her by.

JULIA. Him! Whom?

BLISS (*reproachfully*). Julia! Aren't we all expecting Somebody?

JULIA. *We* are! I don't see how *you* . . .

BLISS. Indeed, I am! I am not as faithless as I seem. I look for His coming, in the quickening dawn of each unfolding moment.

JULIA. But you can't possibly! His coming is only known to . . .

BLISS. Yes, I remember that, too. *Neither the day nor the hour.* But that only means that we must be ready for Him, *every* hour.
Well, I must be toddling. The children . . . Oh, how forgetful of me! That was dear of you, Julia, so dear of you: reading my diary.

JULIA (*aghast*). What! I! . . .

BLISS. Yes, I was above you, in the oratory, meditating. I hadn't the heart to disturb you: you were so happy. So I — meditated. Didn't you enjoy that bit about the Golden Child pulling Dafty into the pantry, and telling him solemnly that she loved him? Affectionate little . . .

But suddenly, she sees JULIA'S *face.*

Oh, you are hurt! You think I was uncompanionable, not coming down to share your pleasure. Not if you knew my heart, Julia. Forgive me.

JULIA. Do you mean, you — don't care?

BLISS. Care! You have a child, too. And then, we have broken bread together.

JULIA. But your private papers? . . .

BLISS. Private! Among friends? *There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed;* you know that. And when it is Julia . . .

JULIA *interrupts her with a nervous laugh.*

JULIA. Of course, so long as you don't misunderstand my motive . . .

BLISS. There is no misunderstanding, where there is love, Julia. We mothers know that!

JULIA (*faintly*). Job! . . .

LIMP. Don't appeal to me! I'm no mother! Never had the slightest desire to be one in my life!

His manner electrifies the atmosphere for a moment. Then MISS BLISS *sees. It is a joke.*

BLISS (*chuckling*). I know why you say that! Because you are a man! You cannot be a mother! Of course, you can't. Of course not! . . . Well, I must go.

She makes for the Refectory. Half way there, she sees the talking machine on her right.

Bless my heart! What is this?

And she totters towards it.

HODGE. Talking machine.

BLISS. Talking machine? . . .

She examines it more closely.

Do you have to put a penny into it?

HODGE. There'll be more than a penny put in that machine, before we've done!

BLISS. I suppose you turn a handle, or do something to it, and it goes on talking.

HODGE. That's the notion.

BLISS. How very clever of it! Very clever, indeed!

She leaves it, takes a glance around her Gothic Hall, and then looks back at the machine, saying with a certain reserve:

Yes!

And resumes her interrupted journey.

Well, well, I must administer their morning word. Make yourselves comfortable (*chuck-*

ling). Ah, Job! Of course, you can't! Of course, you can't.

Which brings her to the Refectory door.

JULIA (*tensely*). Miss Bliss!

BLISS (*mildly*). Yes, Julia?

JULIA. Since you know so much, I suppose you understand he is coming here this morning.

BLISS (*blankly*). He! Who? . . .

JULIA (*sharply*). Who! Aren't we expecting . . .

BLISS (*flaming*). Do you mean — *Him!* . . .

Her trembling hands involuntarily lift themselves towards heaven.

Who told you?

JULIA. He sent me word by special messenger last night.

BLISS. Oh, Word Immaculate! Oh, Blessed Messenger! . . .

She stands rapt, transfigured.

I must go and put them into their little white robes at once.

And she passes quickly through the doorway.

LIMP. Here's a tangle!

JULIA. It's the deceit enrages me! The underhanded spying hypocrisy! And there's an irony, a cunning low-down irony, echoing through her every word!

LIMP. *An* irony! It's triple-fugued!

HODGE. Did you hear about that altar? Virgin Mary, that means! My young people would fall flat dead!

WRAGG. And that bit about the flag?

JULIA. And the indecent reference to mothers?

LIMP. Well, what's your next bright act in this hilarious comedy?

JULIA. The diary! I'll unmask her sins, if it takes till Crack of Doom! Let us read it together! We have ages: I know her morning word! Quick! Prepare for his coming! Then, the offer of heaven first! If she refuses . . .

She pauses for breath. HODGE *and* WRAGG *mistake it for a cue.*

BOTH. Give her hell!

JULIA. Exactly! Come!

And they rat up the stairway in single file.

LIMP. Damn it, they can't be permitted to carry off a think like that! It's not done! Julia! Oh, the devil!

And he follows, fuming, fondling his liver.

As he vanishes, the two doors fly open simultaneously. From the Refectory appears MISS BLISS: DAFTY, *from the Scullery. They hurry forward, meeting in the middle of the Hall.*

BLISS. Dafty! It exhales, it emanates! It is in the air!

DAFTY. There is certainly something in the air!

BLISS. Doesn't your heart beat faster? Don't you feel yourself growing younger every moment?

DAFTY. Younger! I'm a rollicking cherub!

And they both give a little skip.

BLISS. The fields are ripe with the harvest! No more November: it is high summer! There goes my shawl!

DAFTY. And, dang it, there goes the crook out of my back!

He stiffens up laboriously.

BLISS. Whip off your spectacles, man!

He does, and pockets them. She does, hers; placing them on the lectern.

Oh, you are beautiful! You are young and glorious, as the wakening spring!

DAFTY. You are the flower and loveliness of all the blossoming Mays!

BLISS. Quick! We must make ready! I will array me for the Bridegroom in my virgin robes! Look! I relinquish every earthly prop! He is coming! He is coming!

She casts aside her cane; and her little pathetic hands wavering uncertainly in the air, she begins hobbling up the stairway.

DAFTY. He is! He is! But who? . . .

She turns in ecstasy, crying triumphantly;

BLISS. Who but the very Lord of Glory, to awake the slumbering dead!

And with accelerating flight, she flutters up and away to her room.

The shawl is left on the table by the eastern window: the cane, on the floor, at the bottom of the stairs.

DAFTY, *left alone, does a little gambol.*

If required, the Curtain may descend at this point.

THE END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. DAFTY'S *gambol outgrows itself. It becomes delirious, pythonic, tarantulous. As he whirls and swiftly darts from side to side, his brimstone vest wavers like licking fire.*

Altercations are heard above. His rhythms falter to a hircine frisk. And WRAGG, LIMP, HODGE *and* JULIA *appear flurrying down the stairway.*

LIMP. Utterly humiliated! *Your* brilliant craftsmanship, Julia!

JULIA. How was I to know she'd come sneaking back?

WRAGG. Didn't even frame a decent diplomatic explanation!

JULIA. You can't diplomatize, and the goods in your hand!

HODGE. I offered my pocket!

JULIA. Yes, like a bull of Bashan! . . . Oh, do stop! She's perfectly complaisant! Making such an ill-bred fuss!
Well! What demoniac seizure . . .

For, at this moment, DAFTY *waltzes from behind the Bible into view.*

DAFTY. Salvation! He is coming! He is coming!

And, executing a pirouette, he hops to his hole.

JULIA. Everybody knows! It's Doomsday! I shall expect the secrets of my heart to be spread abroad next!

She walks agitatedly to the fireplace, followed by LIMP. WRAGG *squats dolefully on the bottom stair,* HODGE *standing by him.*

WRAGG. Why did she want to change her dress? She's dressed once today.

JULIA. A man's coming! It's all part of her crawling, fascinating . . .
Yes, that breaks my dream!

HODGE. Dream?

JULIA. Yes, one of my nightmares. Can't imagine where I get them! I must catch them from Algernon! First he howls and wakes me: then I howl and wake him: every night!

LIMP. Pleasant household!

She pays no heed. She is labouring with gruesome amnesias.

JULIA. It was just like Mary Bliss! Her eyes! . . .

HODGE *goes over to the eastern window.*

HODGE. Let's get a bit of air. I feel that puthery. And, of course, here, they got nothing for it.

He betokens weanless yearnings.

LIMP. Wish you had my liver!

HODGE. That's friendly!

WRAGG. Feel funny, myself! Oughtn't! My people were always the pink of salubrity. Served their country gallantly till ninety. With munitions.

HODGE. What took *them?*

WRAGG. Senile decay.

JULIA. I can see it now! Her living image! Crawling! That long grey snake! . . .

HODGE. Snakes mean something! My mother dreamed snakes, before she had me. Then I come; and she sort of — faded away.
What come after the crawl?

JULIA. After the crawl! Naturally, I fled shrieking to Algernon! Insensitive little wretch, there he lay, sucking his thumb, as though nothing whatever had happened!

HODGE. That's a sign, Julia! Last time I saw him, little beggar *had* a stomach-ache.

JULIA. He's always having them! It's his elephantine appetite! But what can I do? I must make him fat!

HODGE. Well, you been a true mother, there, Julia! Reminds me of one of them porpoise.

WRAGG. Hope you're making him a good patriot, Julia.

JULIA (*fretfully*). Oh, yes, he has a box of soldiers and a little toy sword. But he's like Alexander! He's clamouring for catapults already! And he's only five!

HODGE. Takes after his father. Lord, how that man did live! *He* died of cirrhosis, Job.

JULIA (*severely*). Pardon me, Algernon favours *my* family!

HODGE. Oh, I don't know! That mouth! . . .

He performs an expansive flap with his hand.

Wish I could get something for this complaint of mine! I might wallow in the bottomless pit itself, and not one finger-tip . . .

No Lazarus forthcoming, he fluctuates back to Algernon.

Does he keep good health?

JULIA. Health! Barring the nightmares and his everlasting tummy, he's vitality itself! Bursting with it!
Only, that's what I say! If a mother doesn't understand the rearing of children, who does? I may be ignorant of the spinster mollycoddlings of the days of Bruce; but I *am* a mother! I can prove that!

WRAGG. Nevertheless, Algernon's gastric miseries are not quite . . .

JULIA. They are quite as relevant as *your* contributions to the occasion! Surely the pangs of maternity have some affinity with a problem involving offspring!

HODGE (*at the window*). But you make us all so tired!

JULIA. I'm not craving an audience! If you're tired, yawn at the scenery!

LIMP (*irascibly*). Yes, but we're getting nowhere! Nothing but ailments, biblical allusions, and infantile precocities!

She squelches him with blistering politeness.

JULIA. Have a *little* patience! *Job!* We don't have to be galloping *every* moment! Even if we're not jigging our legs, our souls are moving — somewhere! . . .

She flares suddenly to her fiercest hate.

Can't you understand, that we are simply dangling on *her* convenience? Wearing our hearts out, whilst that vampire bedizzens herself for *him!* Oh, we'll get there, quickly enough! Watch that stairway! Do you know what I'll do? Laugh! Take it for a joke! Watch! As soon as ever that palsied old mannequin comes crawling . . .

HODGE (*thoughtfully*). 'Tain't a crawl. Not really. Dodder's the word.

WRAGG. More likely to be a cropper, this time. I see, she's forgotten her cane.

HODGE. And Tommy's down on dress. She won't make much hit that way.

JULIA. Don't you hate her eyes? So sly! So — snaky! And the way she coils those withered white locks of hers. . . . Ha! I suppose she thinks *that's* fascinating!

HODGE. There's one thing sure. Face shews it! She's not long for this world.

JULIA. Oh, we mustn't let her do that yet! Pomeroy, pick up the cane.

He does so, and remains standing.

HODGE (*sepulchrally*). That female might pass any moment! If she don't, it'll be lunacies and peculiar dreams!

JULIA (*inwardly*). Yes, I wonder what *she* dreams!

HODGE. Humph, pleasant weather we're having, ain't it? Sort of — cloudy!

He trumpets this in the manner of the Angel Gabriel.

For MISS BLISS *with stately gait descends the stairs. Her hair has changed from white to silvery grey.*

It flows softly from a middle parting, over the ears to a coil at the neck. She is dressed in a delicate lavender crêpe de Chine, daintily frilled, with a fichu of white.

JULIA *essays her laugh; but the joke chokes in her throat. Only the sickliest little gurgle escapes.*

WRAGG, *with an air of gallantry, hastens forward with the cane.*

WRAGG. Here you are, Miss Bliss: *here* you are!

BLISS. No, thank you, Pomeroy. I can do very nicely.

And she sails majestically to the middle of the Hall. She speaks with the gentle dignity and control of a woman of fifty-five.

They watch her, amazed. JULIA *is petrified.*

The children await Him in the chapel. I watched them through the window, as they passed. They shewed like trooping angels. My Blessed One, my Beloved, led them, her golden pennon streaming on the wind like flame.

Then, suddenly, I grew ashamed. Their glistering robes gleamed so spotless beneath the searching day. My own lay close at hand: it has been ready, fifty years. . . . Oh, what does it matter, what does old age, failure, anything matter; if those young white saints out yonder. . . . So I put on this, instead.

Their laughter sounded like the quivering of sacring-bells: their footsteps as they walked along, like the pattering of penitential tears.

There is a discomfortable silence. Then WRAGG *coughs, and offers her the chair.*

WRAGG. Take a chair, Miss Bliss.

BLISS (*sitting*). Thank you, Pomeroy.

HODGE (*soothingly*). There, you'll soon be all right!

Across her, he warns the others with equinoctial privacy.

Humour her!

BLISS. Thank you, Timothy, you do: remarkably. Mayhap, I shall become less querulous, as I grow younger.

JULIA. *Art* won't bring that about, Mary Bliss!

BLISS. Oh, but it can help! Beauty is half the victory! You watch, when He comes . . .

JULIA. Ah! As I thought!

She settles herself stiffly in the high-backed bench. WRAGG *and* HODGE *are on the other side of* MISS BLISS. LIMP *comforts his liver in the fireplace.*

BLISS. And now at last, it is all coming true! The flowers will blossom as before, the trees will wave their high branches, the little brother birds will sing; but with a new meaning. It is coming so quietly, we scarce recognize it. As a thief in the night! The trumpets of it seem far off, like mustering thunders. But it is nigh the gates. Presently, we shall awake, and find the old things done away.
And to think that it is a fairy-tale after all! All magic wishing! All wrought and fashioned out of dreams!

JULIA (*jumping*). Out of what?

BLISS. Dreams, Julia. The very stuff God is made of! Even this other world — the world that is vanishing — it was a dream, too. One that had lost its channels, become clogged up, and

turned to self-destroying nightmares. Now it is passing away. We are recovering our lost infancy. When He comes, He will have a deal to say about that. It will make us understand sin a little better. It will make us more charitable, more pitiful.

HODGE. You know, Miss Bliss, you hadn't ought to talk of God, that way. How would you like to be called stuff? What do *you* say, Julia.

JULIA. Presumptuous, to say the least!

BLISS (*humbly*). Well, I know I am only a little foolish old woman. But I have seen the light.

HODGE. I certainly agree with one thing you said. There's great changes going on. The world will never be the same again. I said that, you know, after the very first year of the war.

He bites his nail, pleased with his perspicacity.

WRAGG. Yes, once we have accomplished our peculiar cultural aims, and called a Conference representing . . .

LIMP. Constitutionalism for one thing, I hope; and no sops to radicalism!

HODGE. War Investments for another; and none to pacifists!

LIMP. Property, and no socialism!

HODGE. Home Enterprise, and no blooming foreigners! Nor trades-unions!

WRAGG. Why then, divinely guided and adequately armed, we shall make the world safe for democracy forever!

BLISS. Yes, He will make all things new.

HODGE. Who? Wragg? . . .

BLISS. Timothy! Whom are we expecting?

HODGE. Oh! . . .
Well, I don't know about *new*. He's a bit old-fashioned. Though he generally makes things hum, when he comes.

BLISS. There's the point. We must make ready for Him. Remember, there were five foolish ones, whose oil . . .

JULIA. No need to fuss! I've made all preparations! I suppose the guest room's all right?

BLISS. Oh, that is always swept and garnished. But I meant, ready in ourselves. In our hearts.

Ought we not to begin, by confessing to one another, our manifold sins and wickedness?

LIMP. You don't find *me* confessing!

JULIA. *I'm* not a Catholic!

WRAGG. I don't mind confessing one. I play poker.

HODGE. I haven't none. They're washed away.

BLISS. Oh, but I have. I committed two, only this very morning.

They strain forward eagerly to hear them.

One was vanity. Whilst I arrayed me, just now, I caught myself wondering whether He would like my hair attired this way.

JULIA. Well, I won't say anything! But I happen to know his opinion on *that* subject!
Go on.

BLISS. I hardly like to confess the other. It was one of the deadly ones.

She fumbles with her handkerchief.

JULIA. Indeed! We'd like to hear it!

BLISS. Oh, yes, I will: I must! . . .
It came to me whilst you read my diary. Suddenly, wickedly, I — I didn't want you to do it!

JULIA. Oh! . . .

Her interest in the confession evaporates.

BLISS. It was evil pride! My penmanship was once as beautiful as yours, Julia. I imagined, if you saw it now, when my poor palsied hand . . .

She breaks off abruptly. She is gazing at her outstretched hand with growing wonder. JULIA *glances at her* sharply.

JULIA. Well? . . .

BLISS. Julia! This is the Lord's doing! It is made whole!

They all crane forward, curious.

WRAGG. 'Pon my word!

BLISS. And then, just now, my cane! Wonderful! I feel it subtly stealing over me! A marvellous transformation!

JULIA. Yes, I noticed that! Especially about the hair!

BLISS. Te Deum, laudo!

LIMP. Auto-hypnotism!

JULIA. Looks queer to me!

And she sniffs the air suspiciously.

HODGE. Wish I could get a drop for my heart!

BLISS. Hark! Do you not hear a sound? One note! And the whirring of chariot wheels! Come, let us go forth to welcome Him!

She rises in an ecstasy. HODGE *presses her back again, with the tact of a rhinoceros.*

HODGE. Come now, be calm, be calm! He'll be here. When do you expect him, Julia?

JULIA. He's due now. And not a moment too soon!

BLISS. Listen! . . .

They do so, straining their ears. MISS BLISS *murmurs as in a trance.*

Ineffable!

JULIA (*impatiently*). It's nothing! I can't think what's hindering him!

BLISS. Hindering! . . .

She slightly materializes, turning towards her.

WRAGG. Perhaps he's being held up by the policemen.

She entirely materializes, turning towards him.

BLISS. Policemen! . . .

WRAGG. Well, he's a pretty high speeder; and with all these crowds in the streets . . .

BLISS. What! Have they begun to rise already?

And she is back in the heavens once more.

WRAGG. Well, at this hour, yes! I'd have spoken myself; only . . . I organized the recruiting, you see.

But it'll be a grand spectacle! Flags and drums! Three great funeral marches by the band! A captured dirigible! Cannon! And afterwards, full-dress military thanksgivings in the cathedral.

MISS BLISS *looks about her bewilderedly.*

BLISS. What are you talking about, Pomeroy?

WRAGG. The Memorial Service, of course! For the dead that have fallen in the war.

BLISS. Dead! Do we talk of death today? . . .

WRAGG. Well, it's not altogether inappropriate, is it? If this isn't the day of death, what is?

HODGE. I agree with you, Pom.

JULIA. Everybody does, who isn't impervious!

BLISS. Oh, how blind I have been! Of course, I see! You, who dwell in the counsels of the Most High, you have made ready, you are prepared! Only I, in my darkness, have dwelt aloof! Of course, of course! I should have remembered Lazarus! And that young man, the only son of his mother — the widow . . . I see! . . .

He will appear then, in the midst of all that stricken multitude yonder; and calmly, majestically, with one awful word of power . . .

HODGE. Come, he's not a megaphone! He's voice enough! But not to grapple with a crowd like that!

BLISS. Not Voice enough! The Word Eternal going out from the Father!

HODGE. Can't you believe? After all, he's only human!

BLISS. No, no, that's heresy! There is that Other Side! And you know what the Creed says about that.

HODGE (*disgusted*). Well, you expect miracles!

BLISS. Undoubtedly! The greatest miracle of all! Don't you?

JULIA *rises, utterly exasperated.*

JULIA. Mary Bliss, have you no mortal notion in your transfigured head, of ordinary earthly limitations? Do come out of the clouds! This isn't a Manhatma, we're expecting! It's a plain two-legged man of God, running a revival.

BLISS. Exactly what I say! Revival: a making alive again. From the Latin, you know.

HODGE. You get such rum ideas about people. Have you ever seen him?

BLISS (*wistfully*). Not face to face! But, of course, the pictures . . .

JULIA. They're totally misleading! Either comic travesties by the cartoonists; or touched-up horrors of himself and family by the photographers.

BLISS. I think that large one of Himself and Family by Raphael in the Louvre . . .

HODGE. If you mean the one with little Johnny doing the pious at the back of him, it ain't a bit like him. That was only for sale.

BLISS. I know He will be different from anything I ever dreamed! I am anticipating that.

HODGE. You bet! He surprises everybody.

BLISS. Yes, He always did.

LIMP. Hadn't you better tell her precisely what's your game?

JULIA. Perfectly useless! You see her mental condition! That stuff she has been taking, I suppose!

BLISS. I know my mind is very dark. What stuff? I have taken nothing but the Blessed Sacrament, all morning.

JULIA. You know what stuff! That stuff for palsied hands!

BLISS. How thankless of me! That heavenly draught! . . .

I perceive I am still unready. Instruct me, Julia.

See, I will obey you like a simple child.

JULIA regards her with a quick searching look.

JULA. Obey! Me? . . .

BLISS. As His chosen one. The revelation came to you. You were the first of all the elect. Tell me, how did His Messenger appear? Like a dream, softly? Or in shining light?

JULIA. Messenger! What messenger?

BLISS. The Messenger that brought unto you His word last night.

JULIA. Don't play the hypocritical innocent! All the world knows the appearance of a messenger!

BLISS. All the world! They are everyone of them awake but me! Had he — from his shoulders — you know? . . .

JULIA. I don't know what uniform he wore! I was busy picking the lobster for Algernon. The

maid answered the door, and brought me the message. Just nine words.

BLISS. As simply as that! And His Messenger! That is how He Himself will come! And in unexpected guise! . . .

Nine! . . .

The mystic number thrills her with remembrances of Dante.

What were they?

JULIA. *Pump up the pigskin. Kick off at ten prompt.*

BLISS. Yes, most unexpected. I must school myself for that.

HODGE. You'll never manage. He springs a new one on you every time.

BLISS (*nodding her head*). Yes, I'm learning. I must not be presumptuous and make remarks. He is not a little schoolboy.

WRAGG. And another thing! Keep silent about those flags. He's patriotic.

BLISS. Is He? Why?

WRAGG. He's one of us.

BLISS. I thought we were one of Him. Five, I mean, of course.

JULIA. Don't split hairs! — Whatever else you choose to do with them! He'll have something to say to you about that! And about your educational ideas!

HODGE. And about dancing!

JULIA. And about Dafty!

HODGE. And play-acting! He'll have a lot to say about play-acting!

MISS BLISS *glances pathetically from one to the other, as they stab her right and left.*

BLISS. I know I have been very remiss. Of course, I have tried to do my duty. But one's best is only filthy rags.

HODGE. There's just one thing about him. You'd better be on. If he gets nosing into your money affairs . . .

How much of old Nick's fortune have you left, by the bye?

BLISS (*guilelessly*). I don't know. I have never counted.

HODGE. Well, don't. I'll watch that for you.

BLISS. Thank you, Timothy! .
Of course, I don't know. I have always held by the Larger Hope, myself; and still do, for all living souls. Even Satan, poor thing. But I have an awful fear for myself that, after all, I shall be damned.

She contemplates this doom with deep solemnity. Then her face lightens with sudden joy.

Ah, but He will love my babies!

JULIA (*ominously*). Time will shew!

BLISS (*radiantly*). Nay, eternity! And when He finds them waiting yonder in the chapel, a little flower-garden all in white; and amidmost of them that precious Heart of Gold . . .

She is interrupted by the raucous toot of an automobile, followed by the grinding whir of wheels upon the gravel outside.

Oh! . . .

They all rise hurriedly to their feet.

I never dreamed that it would sound like that!

She remains standing in the middle of the hall, her hands uplifted like the Blessed Virgin's at the moment of Annunciation.

HODGE, WRAGG *and* JULIA *rush jubilantly to the window, and look out.* LIMP *still hugs his gangrene in the fireplace.*

HODGE. Do you see? That's him in the togs!

BLISS. My soul doth magnify the Lord!

JULIA. Look at his ear! Red as blood! But how appropriate!

BLISS. My spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour!

WRAGG. And the flags! Simply smothered in them! What a patriot!

BLISS. For He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden!

And for one moment, she beholds the Beatific Vision.

If required, the Curtain may descend at this point.

THE END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. JULIA, WRAGG *and* HODGE *are still at the window;* LIMP, *in the fireplace.* MISS BLISS, *with hands uplifted, abides in ecstasy. After a moment she sinks back into her seat. Her hair has turned distinctly darker. She has now the poise and manner of a woman of forty-five.*

JULIA. They've taken him to the Guest Room: so that's all right! Now, Job, Timothy, Pomeroy, let's get busy. I have full instructions. He's dressed. Already got his what-d'you-call-it on. By the time he has combed and brushed his . . .

Bustling down, she halts abruptly, glaring at MISS BLISS. *She tours around her: afterwards glancing suspiciously about the hall.*

Come, Mary Bliss, we can't have you posing there, looking like Madame Somebody's Hair Restorer! He'll want the centre of the . . .

BLISS. Naturally! How thoughtless!

She walks meditatively towards the window. There she picks a pink rose from the bowl on the table, and fixes it in her corsage. JULIA *watches her every moment.*

JULIA. Ah!

Meanwhile, WRAGG *and* HODGE *range helplessly at the back of the hall.*

Pomeroy, move that chair.

He does so, listlessly, a little to the left.

Now, Timothy! Wind the talking machine.

HODGE. And what about my heart? Job, you!

LIMP. Haven't I a liver?

WRAGG. It's in my spine, I . . .

LIMP. Oh, shut up! . . .
Isn't it enough, having to endure *his* coming, without listening to the last rattlings of senility?

He stirs the fire. WRAGG *watches him woebegonely.* HODGE, *with a bad*

grace and many grimaces, sees to the machine.

WRAGG. But it has been coming on steadily all morning!

LIMP. Mine's never off! And it grows!

HODGE. Mine's the limit!

JULIA. Now, Job; hymn books! Bottom of the stairs.

He goes reluctantly, and brings them.

Timothy! Collection plate!

He goes with alacrity. And keeps it.

There's *your* place, Mary Bliss!

MISS BLISS *meekly resumes her chair.*

BLISS. Now that at last it is about to happen, it seems the most ordinary circumstance in the world. Nothing appears different! Here we all are, just the same little group of loving friends, going about our happy daily business; and presently — *He* will come! Is not life beautiful?

JULIA *distributes the hymn books. She then appropriates the middle of the high-backed bench, motioning* LIMP *to the faldstool,* HODGE *to her right, and* WRAGG *to her left.*

JULIA. Job, sit down. Timothy! Pomeroy! . . . Now we can start at once.

She opens her book. Her voice assumes a certain unctuousity, as she announces.

M'yes! Hymn number one: the first hymn, please. Timothy, start the melody.

BLISS. What quaint little hymn books! So — red!

HODGE. That's Johnny! Since he's bagged the hymn book privilege, he's made things boom. The paper's punk; but they sell like sin.

JULIA. Hymn number one! The first hymn, *please!*

LIMP. Yes, but look here, Julia! You can't go sticking measly books before us, demanding song, in this high-handed manner!

JULIA. He has to be worked up, hasn't he? I'm only following instructions! He'll never make his entrance, unless he's properly worked up. He never does.

LIMP. Worked up?

JULIA. Perfectly simple! It's what they do at the theatres! You tickle the audience with expectation: then, just before the hero enters, you give them a patriotic air or something. Naturally, they mistake their emotion for his magnetism, and he . . .

She searches for a phrase. HODGE *finds it.*

HODGE. Cops the lot!

JULIA. Exactly! Entire reputations have been built that way.

LIMP. Have they? Well, there'll be no vicarious magnetism from me, that's flat!

JULIA. I'm not asking magnetism! I'm only asking you to sing!

LIMP. Then I won't!

JULIA. You're here, you're musical, it's good for the liver, and you've got to!

LIMP. If I do, may I sizzle in . . .

JULIA (*severely*). Thank you! We will leave that word for *him!*

HODGE. Me and Wragg'll do. He's a crow's voice, anyway!

LIMP. Ha! . . .

It is a snort of contempt. But he bethinks him.

Crow, eh? . . .

And darting venom at HODGE, *he rips open the book, and joins the choir.*

JULIA. *Now!* We will unite in singing, if you please, hymn number . . .
Oh! Algernon! . . .

HODGE. What about him?

JULIA. Nurse was to bring him to the chapel. Last night's lobster so depressed him I thought perhaps the revival . . .

BLISS (*rising*). Oh, do let me fetch Dafty!

JULIA. Dafty!

BLISS. Yes, he's our spiritual adviser, you know; and so amusing! I think I'd like him to see these odd little books. He'd have something quite bright to say about them, I'm sure.

JULIA. Certainly not! We're here to educate, not amuse!
Come, let us join together . . .

DAFTY *pops in from the Scullery, a fiddle in his hand.*

DAFTY. Here I am, ma'am! Just put my ear to the door, to spy where you were! Can't stop, kids expecting me, I'll come later. Oh, we are having such fun in the chapel!

JULIA. Fun in the chapel! I never did in all my days . . .

DAFTY. No, ma'am, you never did! Frolic! They're making the House of the Lord ring again! Quite like old times! First it was blind man's buff! Then I started them Gathering Nuts and May up in the chancel! Then honey-pots! And now, the Golden Child has got herself up in a surplice, and is taking off Parson Glibspit from the pulpit! Lordy, how she can act! And language! Real preacher's pow-wow, mind you, without the time-serving! All about miracles and the millennium!

Well, I must skedaddle! Just back for my fiddle, that's all! Promised them a jig! Hey cockalorum! Such a lark!

And with a cut and a caper, he scrapes himself out.

JULIA'S *composure is like the arctic north.*

LIMP. Well, I don't see how these interruptions are going to help his entrance!

JULIA *responds with a distant wintry smile.*

JULIA. We shall see! Timothy, may I trouble you, please?

But she cannot keep this up long. Her next remark rages forth like a sirocco.

Hymn one!

HODGE *operates, and the machine grinds out the hymn refrain in shattering rag-time blasts.*

They begin singing in unison, HODGE *and* LIMP *glowering, each intent on bellowing the other down. At the end of the first verse,* HODGE *puts in a tenor. Not to be outdone,* LIMP *in the second, retaliates with bass. Ambitious of alto,* WRAGG *later soars*

to falsetto. The women contribute treble, MISS BLISS *dropping out with a scared face, after the first few lines; and their raptures culminate in a four-part chorus of* JULIA *and the men.*

CHOIR. Come, rouse your lungs and crack your ribs,
Revival's hymn to swell:
We offer heaven: the guy that jibs,
We give to burning hell.
Rejoice! Rejoice! In his sinful fat, he fries!
The savour of him smokes aloft: we smell him in the skies!

BLISS. Don't you think the sentiment a little . . .

CHOIR. Ssh! . . .

And the refrain blares onward, belching into hymn;

We've closed the gambling joints and clubs,
We brighten where we are:
The damned blink up like weary dubs,
And lamp us from afar.
Rejoice! Rejoice! In their sinful fat, they fry!
They frizzle and the juice spits up: we taste them in the sky!

BLISS. Saint Gregory maintained . . .

JULIA (*staccato*). His — own — words! Sing!

MISS BLISS *bows humbly; but her mind will stray back to the Council of Constantinople. Meanwhile, more hymn disgorging, her fellows return to their feast;*

CHOIR. They hoist the booze, they dance, they swear,
Their godless playhouse packs;
But now we've got the doughnuts where
The chicken got the axe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! In their sinful fat, they fry!
They roast like sacrificial goats: we'll eat them
by and bye!

During the last verse, THE REVEREND TOMMY TRAIL, *clad in immaculate football costume striped, comes jaunting down the stairs. He is a red-faced man with huge clutching paws and a sardonic grin. He has mimicked Satan so long, he rather resembles him.*

HODGE, WRAGG and JULIA *settle themselves with the delighted anticipation of the already comfortably saved.* LIMP *looks on, in the manner of Missouri.* MISS BLISS *sits with eyes*

downcast, trembling, never once daring to look round. TRAIL *is a Voice to her, no more. As he begins to speak, she essays to rise, but her knees fail her.*

TRAIL'S *accent is less purely though more markedly American, than that prevalent, say, in Boston.*

TRAIL. Warm up, warm up, you bunch of soda-fountain freezers! That's not the way to handle a hymn! Geraround it! Geraway with it! Biff! Whiz it into goal! Some of you sissified guys have no more kick in your souls than hocked fleas. Aunt Lizzie there, for example!

BLISS. Elizabeth! . . .

And she beholds the sainted cousin of the Virgin.

TRAIL. You! You! Old Lavender Crêpe-de-chine with the flower in your chest! It's roaring, not roses, gains the Throne of Grace! Cough up, you four-flusher!

JULIA. Such discernment! He spots her directly!

BLISS. Lord, I am but an ignorant, sinful woman, and very foolish. I — don't understand.

TRAIL (*mimicking her*). Language don't suit, eh? Too coarse and vulgah! See here! I learned my language way back in the little home town where I was raised; and my little home town is some conversationalist, berlieve muh! My language has been good enough to wake up Philadelphia: it's been good enough for Colorado-Grubb; good enough for every knock-kneed, sheep-jowled, rabbit-gutted minister in the land of the brave and the free; and I guess it'll do for you!

BLISS. I hope I may improve, Lord. I thought mayhap it was Aramaic.

TRAIL. Now, curitout! It was Number One Brand Up-to-date Revivalistic U. S. A.; and don't you forgerit! Are you saved?

BLISS. I fear not, Lord.

TRAIL. Then you're damned!

MISS BLISS *crosses herself, closing her eyes in dumb agony. After a moment, she falters;*

BLISS. Amen, Lord. I will try to bear it. Thank you.

TRAIL. Bear it! This isn't pink teas and frizzy hair! What is it? Theatres? Cocktails? Shake-

speare and the Lady of the Lake? Nit! It's hell!

JULIA. Such fire!

BLISS. Yea, Lord.

TRAIL. Lord! . . .
Say, what's the handout? Put me wise, Puddingface.

HODGE (*histrionically*). Peculiar! Top story! You know!

TRAIL. Got you, Stephano!

BLISS. Stephen! They are *all* here!

She gazes before her, as in vision.
TRAIL *watches her interestedly.*

TRAIL. Acts kind of bughouse, don't she? Only, see here! I didn't come to seek and to save sanatoriums. They have to be opulent high-brow stiffs with pork in their blocks, to get me.

JULIA. Oh, but you must! You were engaged to save *her!*

TRAIL (*turning*). Who's Sister Buttinsky?

JULIA. Who's who? . . .

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He grins at her humourless Europeanism, and motions to WRAGG.

TRAIL. Wield the jawbone, Samson!

WRAGG. This is Mrs. Manners.

JULIA. Yes, we've corresponded, you know. Did you get my . . .

TRAIL. You betcha! Say, that sum was for salvation only, *ex*clusive of expenses. Glad to meecha: take this one! . . .

He thrusts at her his great left paw.

Those rubber-neck crape-heads in the square have fondled the other to a frazzle! Took a collection, and gave them my *Lazarus, come forth!* Ever see me do that stunt? Takes some pep, representing the stone and all!

HODGE. That the one where you tell them, Colorado-Grubb stands four-square for the New Jerusalem?

TRAIL. No, you got it all wrong: that was the other Lazarus! Gee, they swallowed it! Biggest hit I've made since Bethany, way back in God's Own Country! And the crape-heads weeping buckets!

He roars with the remembrance of his triumph.

I left Johnny to it. He savvied a chance of going about his father's business, and dropped off with a bundle of hymns. Say, that's some kid! He's putting it over all right, all right! He'll be here, when he's through.

BLISS (*fearfully*). Which — John?

TRAIL. Why, mine! My own particular! There's only one.

BLISS. The Beloved! Oh, he will speak for me! He is wise, he will understand!

TRAIL. Say, that's not so bughouse! Appreciating Johnny shews some bean. Maybe, I'll snatch her from the burning yet.

BLISS. Lord! . . .

TRAIL. Well, what is it? Tango, cards, liquor? . . .

HODGE. In this place!

TRAIL. Wash the marrer with her? Why don't she speak? Who is the mutt, anyway?

JULIA. Why, she's the woman! You remember, old Nicholas Biggs . . .

HODGE *interposes a loud cautioning cough; but too late.* TRAIL *is on.*

TRAIL. What! The millionairess! . . .

HODGE. Humph, fine weather, we're . . .

And WRAGG *murmurs something about rain.*

TRAIL. Now, curout the barometer stuff! Curitout, see! This is business! Here's a poor perishing cocoa-sodden daff, hollering for bread; and you hand out hunks of cold storage about the weather! Leave this to muh! . . .

JULIA, WRAGG, HODGE (*together*). That's all very well; but *you* . . . Yes, but look here, I say . . . 'Taint good enough: *we* . . .

TRAIL. Hold off, you grafters! . . .

He executes a football manœuvre with a hop, rush, and a slide, landing neatly beside MISS BLISS.

Say, Ma! Don't you listen to them! They're only a bunch of red-headed, starch-necked crooks and wind-jammers, anyway! Listen to muh! Only berlieve! Only berlieve! And I'll yank you into glory in half a jiff!

BLISS. Oh, but my sins! My vain pride! Betrayals!

TRAIL. That's the way! Stir 'em up, Ma!

BLISS. My life of fruitless half-intentions! Doubts! Despairs!

TRAIL. You gorit, Ma! Stick your feet in the trough! Roll yourself over in it!

BLISS. My iniquities!

TRAIL. It's berrer to have them! It's berrer! Or you don't get the berlood! Only berlieve, only berlieve, you lobster, and your sins will pass — kerplunk! — like Gadarene swine. You may look the same! You may act the same! These guys here, and your neighbours may never see the difference! But only berlieve, and you'll be whiter than snow!

BLISS. Lord, I believe! Help Thou mine unbelief!

JULIA. Mary Bliss! Do you realize what you are quoting?

TRAIL. Beat it, Sourface! I'm boss here!

HODGE. Yes, but . . .

TRAIL. Now, Carrots! . . .
Ataboy! Work it up, Ma! Gerabit of punch

into it! Rah-rah-rah! — Tackle! Don't you see the light? Think of Home and Mothuhr! Don't you hear your Mothuhr calling to you? Think of your poor old Daddy's silvery hairs, the village homestead! Remember little Willie's dying words!

Wragg, Hodge and Julia cannot bear up against this. They take out their handkerchiefs and mop their eyes. Meanwhile, Trail *addresses his deity;*

Look at her, Fathuhr! Can't squeeze a tear! Dry as a prohibition state!

He turns upon her savagely, dancing, gesticulating, foaming with inspiration;

Can't you gerabit of fear inside of you? Don't you smell the pitch and brimstone? You'd berrer! You'd berrer! Or you won't be saved by me! Don't you see the licking flames, the red-hot lake, the worm undying, and old Beelzebub hopping about and watching for you? Rah-rah-rah! Tackle! Boom! Boodle! Boost! Geewhiz! Can't you *see* him?

She is not looking; but everybody else can.

BLISS. I behold, at is were, three Blessed Shapes! Elizabeth, and Stephen, and that Beloved One!

TRAIL. Saints won't help any! There's only one way! — Mine! Wrestle, you dub! Get your heart jumping! Make it burn and bubble like a clambake!

BLISS. Yes, yes! A glow, a strange warmth! And with it, a deeping unutterable peace!

TRAIL (*quickly*). You don't get peace yet! Not till after the . . .

BLISS. But I do! It's the truth! I do!

TRAIL. Then, if you do, it's Satan, and you're damned! It's not peace: it's terruhr, you want! Terruhr! Terruhr! Can't you understand the word? — T-E-R-R-O-R, terruhr! Get it in your heart! Get it in your livuhr! Get it in your nuhrves, your spine, you dough-nut! . . .

LIMP *and the saved shew signs of understanding.*

BLISS. But I don't! I cannot lie! I don't!

TRAIL. Then I give you up! You're a goner! You, your ox, your ass, your man-servant and your maid-servant, your autos and your grand pianos

— yes, and all your pap-soused infidel unspanked babies, too! — shall perish in the pit of fiuhr!

BLISS. Oh! . . .

She rises, tense with some deep thought, not yet made clear. TRAIL *mistakes the action, and pounces on her at once;*

TRAIL. Hold that! Hold it tight! Hold it with your teeth! Wow! Gorher! . . .
Now, we'll take the collection. Where's the dipper?

HODGE. That's me. I'm usher!

But TRAIL *restrains him, capturing the alms-dish.*

TRAIL. Nix!

HODGE (*reproachfully*). I'm a Baptist!

He crawls abjectly to his seat.

They all watch TRAIL *earnestly, as he approaches* MISS BLISS. *She is gazing straight before her. He gently insinuates the alms-dish into view.*

TRAIL. Now, Ma!

She answers with slow, bitter irony;

BLISS. And whence is this to me? Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory! All that I have is Thine!

This sends a shiver around the Hall.

TRAIL. All! Will you put that down on paper?

BLISS. My handwriting is a little shaky. But I will. In letters of fire!

TRAIL *sends the alms-dish spinning to* HODGE.

TRAIL. Here, take it, Rufus! Put her thar!

He proffers the frazzled paw. But MISS BLISS *does not see it. She is looking into deep abysses.*

The others start up in violent expostulation;

WRAGG, JULIA, HODGE (*together*). I'm darned, if he . . . / He — shall — not . . . / Of all the swindling . . .

TRAIL. Hold off, you panhandlers! Heard the chink of gold, did you? See here, *I'm* come to save

this soul, not you! And I'll save it, or bust! . . . Keep to it, Ma! I'm with you! Armageddon'll have nothing on me, by the time I'm through! Say, this is to be one big bout, stakes down, between the Dragon and the Lamb! Get her going, do you hear? Rah-rah-rah! Biff! Whiz! *Goal!* . . . It's yours! Take it! Salvation, full and free!

He commences to wipe the sweat from his brow.

BLISS (*quietly*). I refuse it.

He leaves the sweat to freeze as it may.

TRAIL. You — what?

BLISS. I do not desire salvation, thank you very much.

TRAIL. But you've gotta! You've gotta! You can't give all that money, without being saved!

BLISS. Then I will find some other way of serving my beloved little damned.

And she sits down calmly, awaiting the brimstone.

TRAIL. Well, I'll be . . .

DAFTY *skips in, and catches him up;*

DAFTY. Yes, but before you are, I'd like you to carry away the remembrance of a few trifling wheezes by myself. You, sir, I take it, are a funny man. They may amuse you. They may amuse also my good friends in the Other World.

TRAIL. Other world! What other world?

DAFTY (*airily*). Oh, both, both! The infinitude of them, in fact! It's all One to me!

TRAIL. Who is the lynx-eyed prowler, anyway?

HODGE (*histrionically*). He's only a poor old . . .

DAFTY. Not so softly, Mr. Timothy, not so softly: he mightn't hear! . . .

Mr. Timothy was about to inform you in his delicate way, that I am a fool. Well, sir, I am. A sort of professional one, like yourself. I don't know whether you happen to belong to our High and Ancient Secret Order; but I imagine not. There are curious initiations, rather dangerous — fiery ordeals, sacrificial burnings! We are divided into two lodges — my own affiliations, I leave you to infer. The one suckles its folly from the wisdom of the serpent: the other . . .

His eyes rest for a moment on MISS BLISS.

from the innocence of the dove. The Illustrious and Sublime Grand Master combines both.

TRAIL. See here! You can't put one over me, by that line of goods!

DAFTY. Ah, that's precisely what the acquisitive little youth in the chapel said. But they made him eat it, all the same.

TRAIL. Say, wash the marrer with you? Eat what?

DAFTY. A confection, sir. My own making! In appearance, a fine, sweet, tasty piece of huckleberry pie; in reality, a dose of calomel. One of my little jokes! The last time I saw him, they were stuffing his pennies into the poor-box; and heaving him heavenwards with one of the flags. *Tossing the blanket,* you know!

WRAGG. That's how you let them treat flags, is it?

DAFTY. Not our own, sir! Only the enemy's!

HODGE. Which poor-box was that?

DAFTY. The one with the double-padlock, Mr. Timothy.

LIMP. And that's what you call pies! Calomel!

DAFTY. Only for bad livers, sir. Anachronistic misanthropists with cantankerous ones; and converted little youths of trading proclivities, with white ones.

JULIA. What makes you so fiendish? You seem obsessed by some foul spirit of perversity. You're a kind of nightmare!

DAFTY. Just a joke, ma'am! It's the Secret of our Order. I can feel one coming on me, now! Lordy, lordy, He can't leave me alone! He's a rare one for His bit of fun, our Illustrious and Sublime Grand Master!

TRAIL. And who is your Illustrious and Sublime Grand Master, anyway?

DAFTY (*chuckling*). The Holy Ghost. Every way.

JULIA. Stoker, how dare you!

DAFTY. Oh, I dare, all right! That's one of our initiations. Daren't you?

JULIA. This is infamous!

DAFTY. Is it? I thought it was part of our religion.

JULIA. Religion doesn't teach people to make comedy out of sacred things!

DAFTY. Yours mightn't! It taught Saint Francis! It taught the thirteenth century! It taught the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, when He made that little joke about Dives, and the "great gulf fixed." And when He put that pun upon Peter! And that good one He palmed off on the teetotallers, down in Cana of Galilee.

TRAIL. How do you know, your interpretation . . .

DAFTY. Ah, you see, I'm initiated! I found out a lot of things like that, when they cracked the third chestnut, down in the Seventh Circle!

HODGE. Look here! *I* belong to a Secret Society. I'm treasurer. How did a fellow like you come to be initiated?

DAFTY. A little accident, Mr. Timothy, a few short years ago. When I was in the world, taking care of other people's money, like you.

HODGE. What was it?

DAFTY. I died.

They look at him with amazement.

TRAIL. Say that again.

DAFTY. I died.

TRAIL (*ironically*). Anything else?

DAFTY. Yes, I was buried. There were grand obsequies. And I went to my own place. Then, like Lazarus, I came forth.

TRAIL. Say, have you the nuhrve to stand there, and tell me flatly, you were dead?

DAFTY. I'll tell you something to scare you worse than that! I'm alive.

TRAIL. See here! You talk about coming back from the grave. Are you saved or damned?

DAFTY. Both! Saved, when I forget myself, and make a joke. Damned, every time I begin thinking about my soul.

TRAIL. You can't geraway with it, that way. Have you been in hell?

DAFTY. Frequently! Lot of good people down there.

TRAIL. Well, haven't I named them?

DAFTY. Yes, but you don't properly know hell. Not yet. I regret to disillusionize you, my lurid sir, but you really paint that place abominably.

TRAIL. I mean to. I guess, your hell is one of these high-brow Fifth Avenoo gin-palaces, with feather-beds and *Selections by Paderewski* in the parlour! My hell's something fierce! It's smoke, and sulphur, and bubbling gulfs of fiuhr! Don't that paint hell properly?

DAFTY. No. It's worse! And absolutely real!

TRAIL. Say, here's a knock-out! What brought *you* down there?

DAFTY. My sins, mostly. Sometimes — other people's.

TRAIL. If you call that theology, I don't!

DAFTY. Oh! What brought Christ there?

HODGE. Well, I ain't orthodox, I ain't dogmatic: I'm just plain Baptist! And if it's your outworn Catholic Creed you're trying to ram down my throat . . .

DAFTY. I'm not! It's your brand-new Baptist Bible. That bit of Peter's about *the spirits in prison.*

BLISS. What sins brought you there, Dafty?

DAFTY. Do you mean my own? . . .

BLISS. Yes,— your own.

DAFTY. Humph! I don't know whether they will all be quite respectable to confess, in the presence of so many of the saved. You see, when I was on earth, I wasn't exactly an anybody. I was a successful man.

HODGE. Do you mean, rich?

DAFTY. Stank with it! — Millions! That was my first big sin — Theft! Next, I built great palaces, and squandered myself like a hog! — Luxury! I ground the faces of the poor, I fattened upon the harlotries, took usury, interest, tenement rents, grew ruthless. Then came Pride and Vainglory, and all the swollen Pomps that follow in the path of pitiless Ambition. And with them, uncharity of heart, vile rancour, resentments, bitter hate. Well, God had His little joke on me for that. He brought me low.

TRAIL. Didn't I say? That comes of dying without a religion.

DAFTY. Oh, but I didn't! You don't remember, but you saved me yourself. There is a specially deep hell for that. Down among the liars, the abominations, the blasphemers! After my conversion, my other sins seemed light. But they weren't! Nor their punishment! I coveted my neighbour's goods, his powers, even his vir-

tues! I grew envious, and belittled him! I tried to desecrate his highest gifts! I was present at the surpliced blessing of the workers of iniquity, and took God's Name in vain. I have cherished the dishonourable deeds of my fathers, and made their honour to perish from the earth! I have beclouded my nation's glory in a glamour of empire-building. I have besmirched my flag! Last of all, I committed murder. I began mildly, in my own factories and slums. Then I fostered pacific occupation in foreign countries. Then I went in wholesale! — I poured my billions into it! Then — I died.

TRAIL. And then?

DAFTY. Hell.

TRAIL. Didn't that make you berlieve and tremble?

DAFTY. I trembled. You don't believe at first. You don't know you are there. You tremble first, and believe afterwards.

BLISS. And your — resurrection?

DAFTY. It took innumerable ages. You don't reckon ages there, as you do here. You get them — wrong end of the telescope, so to speak. There I lay, outside time, beyond space, in the very

bottom of the pit, pondering my sins. They came one by one, each with its own pang, until I saw them — real! Then I had to name them aright. Did you ever try naming your sins aright? I did. And then there appeared — the Optical Illusion! . . .

He sees it again in his imagination;

It was an Enormous Eye!

JULIA. An Eye? . . .

He fixes her like a basilisk, and then nods his head once, solemnly.

DAFTY. I had been gazing at it all those aeons, and had never known it. I mistook it for the sky. And it was that Watching Dread. And at last — it winked at me.

JULIA. Winked! . . .

DAFTY. Yes! Not one of your impudent winks, you understand; but a real friendly *Come-along-home* of a wink, such as you might give yourself. It was the very first joke I ever saw. So I began climbing. And was initiated from that moment.

There flames from him a sudden ecstasy of white fire;

Ah, that Golden One! She shall never know those dark abysses! For her, the gladness and the rapture only! The unending Fun among the dancing stars!

WRAGG. Well, I wish you joy of her!

DAFTY. It's mine, eternally! Why, her wings are sprouting forth already. Her eyes are dazzling with the daylight of new heavens! She, out of all the young awakening world can see! Lordy, I never met such vision, since first I started making spectacles!

OMNES. Spectacles! Did you make spectacles?

DAFTY. Telescopes, too! And microscopes! Microscopes so powerful, they can peep into the minutest heartbeat of a man! And telescopes to search the farthest heavens!
This is vainglory! I shall be damned for this. So long!

He moves to the Scullery door. There, he turns.

(*Chuckling.*) Oh, I forgot! That little youth, they're entertaining in the chapel! Such a lark!

TRAIL. Wharabout him? Cough up your last joke and go!

DAFTY. He tried selling hymn-books to them! It's your Johnny!

And he vanishes rapidly.

TRAIL. My Johnny, tossed to heaven! Here! I'll revive the little skunks for this!

He bolts through the Refectory door.

HODGE. The poor-box! Chock full! And *him* about!

WRAGG. That infamy by the altar!

JULIA. My Algernon! Among those ragamuffins!

They bolt also. LIMP is left sitting in *the fireplace, silent, brooding.*

After awhile MISS BLISS *arises as from a dream, and moves slowly, feebly up the right.*

BLISS. How cold it is!

She picks up her shawl and puts it on, as when she first appeared. She goes to the lectern, turns over the leaves of the Bible, and tries to read.

I cannot see. My eyes are dim with tears!

She finds and fixes her spectacles. Then she reads;

I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

She gropes blindly for her cane; and then totters weakly to the high-backed bench. There she crumples up, a little bent thing, her hand trembling. She continues so for a moment. Then glancing across the fireplace, she becomes aware, in a dazed kind of way, that LIMP *is there.*

Why, Job Limp, are you still here?

If required, the Curtain may descend at this point.

THE END OF THE THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. LIMP *still occupies the faldstool:* MISS BLISS, *the high-backed bench. Her hair is brown: in her eyes, there is a growing alertness. At present, however, she still sits crumpled, shawled and spectacled, fumbling at her cane.*

LIMP. Yes, I'm here. Romping with ritualistic infants offers no allurement to a hobnailed liver. There's nothing for it but endurance and damnation.

BLISS (*thoughtfully*). Yes, we must abandon all hope. Even Dante said that.

LIMP. It's not as if there's anything one can do!

BLISS. I wonder! Of course, if what Dafty said . . .

LIMP (*disgustedly*). Dafty!

And MISS BLISS *sinks deeper into her own meditations.*

BLISS. I suppose, I shall occupy eternity, seeking out all the little damned babies, and trying to cool the tips of their darling tongues. They will be doubly orphaned now! . . .

Anyhow, He can't stop me loving them!

She considers this, steadily. Then a new thought dawns upon her;

Job, have you ever yielded to the dreadful temptation of doubt?

LIMP. It's my entire philosophy. The moment I'm shewn anything, I doubt it. That and *this* infernal torment go together.

BLISS. I have wicked promptings, too.

LIMP. He talks about hell! — I'm there already! And it keeps on increasing! Everlastingly! It's for all the world like quicklime in your back!

BLISS. Yes, a searching fire! Only mine's in my heart.

LIMP. Oh, Lord, another of them! I suppose *he'll* come bellowing his ailments next!

BLISS. Who?

LIMP. That gospel-monger!

BLISS (*shocked*). Job! If He should hear you!

LIMP. I'm not afraid of his pitch and brimstone!

BLISS (*fearfully*). Isn't doubt appalling? It puts such frightful thoughts in one's head. It almost makes one rebellious against Divinity Himself! . . .

And she begins probing another abyss;

Job, do you think, perhaps, Satan may have been a little maligned? Poor thing, he may be kinder than we have been taught to believe. Less brutal, more — cultivated.

LIMP. He'd be an improvement anyway, on this fellow's scarecrow of a god! He couldn't be worse!

BLISS. What awful things you dare to say! I was thinking that, also.

LIMP. Then why on earth don't you say it?

BLISS. Oh, I couldn't! I wouldn't dare! Not yet.

LIMP. Yes, it's people that daren't, people that are afraid of hell, who keep this mountebank's theology alive!

BLISS. But I wouldn't quite know how.

LIMP. It's perfectly simple! You only have to open your mouth, emit a few forcible words, and send shivering to oblivion an obviously mendacious god.

BLISS. Do you mean that His God . . .

LIMP. I mean that his god is a lie! Whatever gods there may or may not be, his is an imposture.

BLISS. But God must be true! Why, I have known Him! Oh, Job! . . .

She rises, a curious gleam awakening in her eyes.

LIMP. What is it now?

BLISS. I hardly know! All sorts of queer texts! In my mind! . . .

That one about Satan coming as an angel of light! The lying spirits, sent to deceive! That fearful one, foretelling false Christs and false prophets, to seduce, if possible, even the elect!

LIMP. Now, you are going beyond me.

BLISS. If only I dared to believe it! If only I dared! Oh, it makes me hot to think of it!

She removes her shawl. LIMP *clutches his back in agony.*

LIMP. I'm burning, too! It's fire unquenchable!

BLISS (*anxiously*). Oh! . . .

She sinks back timidly, her resolution wavering. She then bends forward with the confidential air of a conspirator.

Didn't you think His trumpet sounded a trifle coarse?

LIMP. Trumpet? . . .

BLISS. Yes, and then those horrid little books! And that hymn! One expected surprises; but somehow . . . The *Magnificat* was so much more — mannerly.

LIMP. It was his clownish attempts at humour got me!

BLISS. Just what I say! Of course, Saint Francis was a funny man. So was Brother Juniper. But it wasn't all about football. They had quite a number of ideas in the dark ages.

Didn't you imagine too, that He would be more of a — well, it isn't exactly a nice word nowadays — but more of a gentleman?

LIMP. What! . . .

BLISS. In the old-fashioned sense, I mean: the sense of chivalry. When there *were* gentlefolk.

LIMP. Well, aren't some of us that now?

BLISS. Oh, yes, in a way. But I mean — really. In the thirteenth century way, for instance. When we were gentle; and of the folk. I remember Dafty once telling me that the last grace of a woman was to be a good gentleman. I took it for a joke at first: I'm afraid I'm rather slow. But after I had meditated a few days, I found a great truth in that remark. Woman's honour is not enough. I have striven to be a good gentleman, ever since.

LIMP (*growling*). Yes, Dafty *would* say a thing like that!

BLISS. Wouldn't he? Sometimes, *he* reminds me of Saint Francis. He's so comical.

LIMP. Lot he knows about gentlemen!

BLISS. Oh, but indeed, he does! You mustn't sup-

pose, because he's sometimes solemn, that he's modern. He's really perfectly out of date.

LIMP. Well, so am I. But you don't find me cracking jokes. And I live entirely in the past.

BLISS But shouldn't we make the past live in us?

LIMP. Whatever are you driving at?

BLISS. Just that, Job. We should make the past alive. That's one way of reanimating the dead and dying present — the gentleman's way. Then, there is that better way, the workman's — bringing the future to birth, today. And best of all, the saint's! — To dwell unceasingly in life eternal.

LIMP. Well, I don't understand saints. And I'm not interested in workmen.

BLISS. The thirteenth century gentleman was. He helped them to Magna Charta.

LIMP. Yes, and look at their gratitude! They have brought our class to beggary!

BLISS. Messer Bernard didn't mind. He beggared himself, embracing holy poverty.

LIMP. A gentleman must have house and food and raiment.

BLISS. Saint Francis went in tatters, feasted on bread and water, and housed himself in wattles.

LIMP. What about our young girls, our delicately-nurtured women, ladies? . . .

BLISS. The Holy Lady Clare was a young girl, delicately-nurtured.

LIMP. Hang it all, I'm no modern! — But we must allow *some* difference between ourselves and the thirteenth century.

BLISS. That's what I'm saying. There is a difference. A difference of ideal. I wonder why it should be just that one.

LIMP. You think it is because they had a different gentleman?

BLISS. I think it is because they had a different God.

LIMP. Look here! What's coming over you?

BLISS. I don't know. Something curious has been happening to me ever since I began — questioning, just now. My mind seems to be awakening. It is as clear as it was when I was a woman of thirty-five. I am beginning to see again. Yes, I see quite . . .

What am I doing with these things on?

And she takes off her spectacles. She then looks at him keenly.

Why, bless me! How old are you, Job?

LIMP. Forty-five! And feel like Methuselah!

BLISS (*thoughtfully*). Yes, those extra ten years tell, don't they?

LIMP. It isn't the years! It's liver! And it grows worse, when I don't get exercise! Ugh!

He rises, pressing his back, and begins doddering away.

BLISS. Poor Job! . . .

Here, take my cane. Let me help you.

She jumps up briskly and trips towards him.

LIMP. I'm not an octogenarian! Nonsense! . . .

Well! Such . . .

Treating a man of forty-five, as though he were . . .

He takes the cane, refusing her arm, with a grunt. He then crawls pain-

fully to the eastern window. Miss Bliss *watches him from the middle of the Hall.*

What a disgusting day! Nothing but clouds!

I'd feel better if there were a speck of sky in the universe! But I doubt it!

Bliss. Try doubting the clouds, Job.

Limp. Don't try that metaphysical piffle on me. I'm too old.

Hodge *enters from the Refectory. He appears woe-begone, his face puffy and puckered; and moves with the heavy lassitude of a fat man inwardly flustered.*

Hodge. Oh, my heart! Ready to burst! I'm ageing fast!

Limp *makes a noise like a snarling dog.*

All very well, saying *Wow!* I'd swop my heart for your liver, any day! That last lap round the cloisters has added twenty years to my life. Little tripehounds!

Bliss. Why, what's the trouble, Timothy?

HODGE. Trouble! Your blighted orphans are the trouble! Especially that yellow hussy with the pink legs! Pack of unregenerate heathens, that's what they are!

BLISS. Come, Timothy, I can't have my children calumniated. They are baptized members of the Holy Catholic Church.

HODGE. Yes, that's the mischief! Baptizing babies in long clothes, before they have the sense to know their own carnal minds. Not a seven-year-old in my Sunday School don't know better than that!
Lord! . . .

He tumbles into the chair, panting.

LIMP (*testily*). You've evidently something to say. Stop blowing, and say it!

HODGE. You nurse your liver! My complaint's the star turn now!

You haven't a drop of anything handy, have you?

BLISS. Why, certainly.

She dances to the table. He moistens his mouth expectantly.

HODGE. If it hadn't a-been for that darned football I'd never have been caught. They was all inside the chapel, hullabalooing with Tommy. Then that old resurrected corpse must needs come jigging out for the football; and he sicked the kids on me.

MISS BLISS *has accomplished her errand of mercy. She offers him a glass.*

BLISS. There! That will refresh you!

Licking his lips, he lingers fondly before tasting.

HODGE. I wouldn't a-minded, if that yellow one — with her blamed spiky elbows . . .
What is it?

BLISS. Water.

HODGE. One thing on top of another! Here! . . .

He hands it back again.

Ain't you got nothing interesting in the house? Something really — wet?

BLISS. Surely! Cocoa!

Inspired by that bright idea, she begins hastening away.

HODGE. Cocoa! . . .

Stop! It's no use! I'd *rather* die. We all got to go some day.

LIMP. Ugh!

HODGE. Yes, you too! Old groggy liver!

MISS BLISS *returns the glass to the table.*

LIMP. What I'd like to know is, what were you doing in the chapel porch, alone?

HODGE. That's my business.

LIMP. Yes, I know it's your business! But how much did you make on the deal?

HODGE. If you think the price of a few hymn-books can pay me for that rat-hunt round them cloisters, you're dead off it! Lanky little line-prop!

LIMP. Cracksman! Picking padlocks!

HODGE. You didn't have to, see! The boxes in this place have mouths like . . .

It's comfort I want! Water ain't no comfort, and nothing in it.

He works his features like a desirous babe. Miss Bliss, *who has been studying him closely, now comes down to him.*

Bliss. Timothy, what have you been doing with the poor-box?

Hodge. Didn't say I'd done nothing, did I?

Bliss. Precisely! That's why I ask.

Hodge. What are you nagging me for? Don't you know I'm a dying man?

Bliss. Wouldn't you wish to make restitution before you go?

Hodge. What's wrong with you? This ain't your character. I don't kind of recognize you, when you get suspicious. What's happening to the world?

Bliss. I think perhaps I am becoming saved, Timothy. There are certain Christian graces I have neglected. The wisdom of the serpent. Doubt, enquiry, investigation. I am even hoping to see jokes shortly.

Come, Timothy, give it to me.

HODGE. You'd better ask that dancing skin and bones, you call your Golden One! What more right has she to it, than me? She got it all! Some of my own, too!

BLISS. Ah! Then it is safe, in *her* hands.

HODGE. Why more than in mine! Thievery, I call it!

BLISS. There are honest thieves and dishonest ones, Timothy.

HODGE. Never could understand what you saw in that child, anyway! One of these days you'll be finding her out, and wishing you'd picked somebody more — ordinary. Mind, I'm telling you as your friend.

BLISS. Those pennies belong to God's poor, Timothy.

HODGE. There you go again! *I* ain't got them! That little baggage stripped me of my uttermost farthing! This comes of going about half-naked, and Roman Catholic practices!

BLISS. God's poor, Timothy!

HODGE. Well, the poor don't always get what's coming to them! They can't expect it! Not in an age of enlightenment and free competition.

BLISS. Some of them are starving, Timothy.

HODGE. You don't know nothing about it. This ain't a question for school-ma'ams! It's a question for hard-headed men of business! You go back to your thirteenth century, and entertain yourself.

BLISS. Yes, we'd have to go back quite some way for entertainment.

HODGE. Ain't *we* entertaining?

BLISS. I suppose we are. In a grim kind of fashion.

HODGE. Well, if we ain't funny, we have our compensations!

BLISS. Such as . . . ?

HODGE, Such as! What about our monster factories, our skyscrapers?

BLISS. What about the mediaeval gilds, the great cathedrals?

HODGE. Consider our educational institutions!

BLISS. Consider theirs!

HODGE. What did they produce? A pack of monks! Look at our thinkers, scientists, states-

men, captains of industry! I could holler a few names now, in this very place; and they'd jump up like Jack-in-the-boxes!

BLISS. Look at Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon, King Louis the Saint of France, the nameless masters of the Crafts!

HODGE. I don't know the parties, but they simply weren't in it with us! Look at the things we done! Locomotives, electric light, ocean liners, aeroplanes! — not to mention submarines! Do you happen to know how many bushels of wheat the United States alone export annually? How many gallons of oil? Tons of silver, pig-iron? I don't myself; but it's something cruel! Don't that indicate efficiency? Ain't we the right to call ourselves the most astounding century in all history? I tell you now, as I told my young Baptists many a time: we're the human limit! And we deserve every penny!

BLISS. Not at the expense of God's poor, Timothy.

HODGE. I'm talking business, I tell you! The poor got nothing whatever to do with it!

BLISS. They had in the thirteenth century.

HODGE. The thirteenth century is dead.

BLISS. Then may it rise again, and scourge us for our sins!

The wild shrieking of a woman is heard outside.

LIMP. What in the name of . . . Are we suddenly going to resolve ourselves into a Greek tragedy?

BLISS. Yes, it's exactly like the prelude to a kommos.

The cries now mingle with the groaning of a man, followed by "Damn, damn, damn!"

That doesn't sound like Sophocles!

HODGE. Sounds like Pomeroy and Julia to me. She'll pass on some day, with them hysterics!

The lamentations continue, and come nearer.

LIMP. This suspense is getting on my nerves!

WRAGG *and* JULIA *make parodos from the Refectory, wailing threnodically. They create a small orchestra out of the middle of the Hall, circling it with anguished pantomime; and then stand tragically opposite each other.*

HODGE *edges away to the left:* MISS BLISS *to the right.*

JULIA. Algernon's safe: he overslept himself: he lives! But I am perishing!

WRAGG. I am but a bag of bones! One stark decrepitude!

JULIA. I have put on thirty years in thirty minutes! A year a minute!

WRAGG. I've put on fifty: Tommy, hundreds! He's an ancient monument! A cairn! A pyramid!

JULIA. The horrors I have witnessed! I have witnessed sacrilege! Hymn-books, bibles, a man of God and footballs, all jumbled up together!

WRAGG. I have seen flags desecrated!

JULIA. I have beheld iniquity! I have looked upon dreams of the night!

WRAGG. If they had only shewn discrimination; but they would not!

JULIA. We many times attempted extrication; but we could not!

WRAGG. That last race round!

JULIA. The ignominy of it!

WRAGG. The pickaback!

JULIA. The jump-frog!

WRAGG. That leaping wild-cat with the bony knees!

JULIA. My rumpled raiment! My dishevelled hair! and as for *him!* . . .

WRAGG. Yes, as for *him!* . . .

BLISS. Why, what's the matter with him?

They both wheel to the right, simultaneously.

BOTH. Matter! . . .

JULIA. They're playing football with him in the chapel!

HODGE. Didn't he scatter them?

They both wheel to the left.

BOTH. Scatter! . . .

WRAGG. You should have seen that last great scrimmage at the altar!

JULIA. They got him down! They pummelled him all over!

WRAGG. They whacked him with the ball, and made him yell!

JULIA. He threatened them with death: he mentioned hell!

WRAGG. But that's not all! They found another game!

BLISS. What did they call it?

They wheel to the right as before.

BOTH. Horse and wagon! . . .

WRAGG. He was the horse, and they hung on behind.

JULIA. They danced, bare-legged! And then that shocking show!

HODGE. What shocking show might that be?

They wheel to the left.

BOTH. Saint and Dragon! . . .

JULIA. That little yellow horror yoked him to her girdle, and made him tamely crawl!

BLISS. Ah! Saint Margaret! Saint Margaret!

JULIA. Another painted him in red and blue and gold!

BLISS. Saint Gertrude!

WRAGG. He romps and roars!

JULIA. He grinds his teeth! He has torn candles from the altars, and trampled on them!

WRAGG. He foams, he wallows! He wraps himself in flags!

JULIA. And worse than that! Far worse!

BLISS (*breathlessly*). What? What? . . .

JULIA. They've stuck a tail upon him, dipped him in the font, and named him Father Devil!

BLISS. Oh, glorious Gothic Centuries! Risen from the grave at last!

WRAGG. What! You condone it!

JULIA. You advocate profanity!

HODGE. You've done it! I knew you'd go too far! This comes of Orphanages instead of Lucifer!

JULIA. You — nun! You childless infidel! Do you dare . . .

WRAGG. Have you the naked impudence to maintain . . .

There are heard howls of childish derision, rapidly increasing in volume. They listen silently. Then LIMP *goes to the eastern window.*

LIMP. My God! . . .

HODGE. What is it? Good Lord! . . .

He has joined him at the window.

LIMP. Look! And the hailstones rattling down like ostrich eggs!

There is a rumbling of thunder and the clatter of hail, the laughter pealing through it like a clash of chimes.

BLISS. Oh, my army! My little army! The army with banners! I faltered, I fell by the wayside! But they, my babies, my beloved, they have kept the faith!

JULIA (*apprehensively*). Is he coming?

LIMP (*grimly*). Like an apocalyptic beast!

JULIA *goes completely off her head.*

JULIA. He is coming! He is coming! He will tear us all to pieces! Quick! Pomeroy! Turn on the machine! It may soothe the evil spirit in him, as Thingumabob soothed What-do-you-call-him!

WRAGG, *with what celerity he may, limps to obey.*

JULIA. Look to yourself now, Mary Bliss! This is the end of everything! He will come like a ravening dragon!

BLISS (*crossing herself calmly*). In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, I will.

And the Hymn of the Beast blares forth.

TRAIL *rages in from the Refectory. His football suit is all disordered, but the stripes shew well. His face is painted red and blue and gold, faithfully portraying the devil as imagined — and buffooned — under the patronage of Mother Church in the mystery plays of the unenlightened ages. He is furnished with a tail. He has lost his voice; and can only express himself that way, in hoarse and almost inarticulate gibberings.*

He is not at a loss, however. His pantomime, which is plentiful, and dithyrambic, reveals his meaning. And the hymn helps "some."

They make wide room for him, as he staggers to the middle of the Hall.

TRAIL. I've lost my voice! I'm done! I'm a dead-beat! I'm a stiff! Wow! Doughnuts! . . .

He performs a tortured cake-walk, making tracks for HODGE. *That worthy flies.*

HODGE. Don't you come near me! I'll pay up! Oh!

He gambols JULIA-*wards, grimacing horribly.*

JULIA. Oh! Save me, somebody! I'm a mother!

She scuttles, screaming, behind MISS BLISS. TRAIL *veers for* POMEROY.

WRAGG. Don't maul me! I'm Pomeroy Wragg! Oh!

TRAIL *dodges him round the chair. This shews off his tail to fine ad-*

vantage. Also, the legend on his back: MISTER TRALE HAS A TALE.

HODGE. Well, that's funny!

His laughter rouses the dragon in his wrath.

TRAIL. Funny! Here, where's my brimstone? Wow! Curitout! Laugh, you bric-a-bracs! Keep sunny, will you! Smile! Smile! Smile! The devil will get you! Hell! Hell! Hell! Mothuhr! Fathuhr! Terruhr! Wow! Stop that blasted wheezing-machine!

He has been dancing like a dervish all the while, chasing first one, then another of them around the Hall. Now, foaming and impotent, he falls to the ground, gnawing at the chair like an inspired revivalist. The talking machine ceases.

BLISS. Oh! Oh! Oh! . . .

And she goes off into hymns of youthful laughter.

TRAIL (*grovelling*). What the earthly tabernacle are *you* sunny over?

BLISS. A Thing immortal, indestructible, eternal in the heavens! A Thing not builded by earthly hands! A Thing against which the gates of hell shall not prevail! Oh! I am becoming initiate! I see the joke!

JULIA. He will destroy us! Are you mad?

BLISS. Beyond recovery! Oh, Illustrious and Sublime Grand Master, receive me now!

TRAIL. Cackling won't get you there! Berlieve, you mutt!

BLISS. I will, unfalteringly! I will clothe myself in readiness! Worthy or unworthy now, I will apparel me, as a witness! Not in my own righteousness! His! His!

JULIA. Mary Bliss! Think of the Day of Judgment.

BLISS. I do, undoubtingly! Oh, I have been faithless! I have betrayed my Master! I have hearkened to the voice of Anti-Christ, and the hosts of hell! My Lord, I come! I come! I come! . . .

And, like one of her own girls, she bounds up the stairway, two steps at at a time, light as a feather, and vanishes.

They stand looking after her in consternation. The thunder rumbles. TRAIL *lies prone on the floor, blasphemous, biting the dust. He has been brought to Jesus at last. It is perhaps the beginning of his salvation. Salvation "as by fire." So be it. In the Name of Christ, Amen.*

If required, the Curtain may descend at this point.

THE END OF THE FOURTH ACT

THE FIFTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. JULIA *and* WRAGG *are on the right:* LIMP *and* HODGE, *left.* TRAIL *still cherishes the floor. Stiff, motionless, they face the stairway: then all begin babbling together.*

LIMP. What's the matter with the woman? Has she gone clean, stark, raving, ecstatically mad?

JULIA. She's gone upstairs to do something desperate! They can't blame me! I'm absolutely innocent!

HODGE. She's an anarchist! She's capable of bombs! She's capable of burning bunting!

WRAGG. She'll take a dose of strychnine! I could see it in her eye! This comes of fool investments!

TRAIL. Lynch the petrified Babylonian! She's the you-know-what from Revelations!

They cease suddenly. There is a pause. Then TRAIL *rasps hoarsely.*

Don't let her geraway with it! Rat her out!

LIMP. That's right! We must stop her!

JULIA. We'll put her in a padded cell!

WRAGG If it's nitro-glycerine . . .

HODGE. She'll be rattling by the time we . . .

TRAIL. Biff! Gee! Whiz! Rah-rah-rah!

And in football formation, led by TRAIL, *they rush for the stairway. They halt abruptly; for there, heralded by crackling thunder and in a glare of lightning, appears* DAFTY, *guarding the way.*

He is marvellously changed. Clad in school-made kilt and corselet, bare-toed with greaves, ridge-capped and mantled; he bears a ludicrous resemblance to a Giovanni Pisano archangel. He holds himself erect, his young-old face gleaming with ironic glee. In his hand, uplifted, is a toy sword.

DAFTY. Back, back, blasphemers!

OMNES. Why! It's only Dafty!

HODGE. In them pageant togs, I told you of.

Reassured, they rally, and make another dash. There is more thunder.

DAFTY. Stand back, or else this flaming sword . . .

They obey unconsciously. He continues, mysteriously.

It is of wood! It's name is Makebelieve! It can work miracles! I forged it for the Golden Child, last June! Her mark's upon it!

Magnetized, though they don't know why, they edge away. All but LIMP.

LIMP. This pontifical mummery may impress priest-ridden brats! I'm not one.

DAFTY. Then for you, I bear another charm!

LIMP. I doubt it!

DAFTY. It will set you smarting, when it once begins.

LIMP. Fiddlesticks! . . .

But he hobbles to a safe distance.

What brings you back, I'd like to know? I thought you'd done!

DAFTY. I was sent!

LIMP. What muddle-headed jester wished *you* on us again?

DAFTY. One, you doubt.

JULIA. Tell us the plain, unvarnished, *utterly paltry* truth! Where did you come from?

DAFTY. The lower heavens. I've been climbing.

HODGE. Well, I think if I'd climbed that far, I'd a-gone a mile further!

DAFTY. Even you couldn't! Something is in the way! Descending! And it's coming nearer, every moment!

HODGE. What? . . .

LIMP. Hailstones, you ass!

DAFTY. Armageddon.

HODGE. That means the war, don't it?

DAFTY. The final one.

WRAGG. That's a dream! There'll be war as long as there's a flag left on earth.

DAFTY. That is true!

WRAGG. Very well then! Let's prepare!

DAFTY. To the uttermost farthing! Now that there's this new army entering the field.

WRAGG. Do you mean the United States?

DAFTY. I mean this new army, descending now, out of the skies.

WRAGG. Some vast aeroplane scheme, eh? What! Today's news?

DAFTY. Yesterday's. It's so old people don't believe it.

WRAGG. What flag?

DAFTY. No flag. It is an army, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, with symbols more terrible.

WRAGG (*hotly*). What symbols?

DAFTY. Banners.

HODGE. I don't see no difference.

DAFTY. You will, when the danger's over. In the Millennium.

WRAGG (*excitedly*). Now, keep to your story! No utopian babblings!

DAFTY. Well, that's the story, if you could only grasp it. I hold a secret commission under that army. I simply have to babble. I'm a spy.

OMNES. Spy! . . .

LIMP has been listening intently. He now advances, and says ironically.

LIMP. Let's get a little clear light on this, my man. Something uncompromising and in the open. This flagless army you crack up so valiantly! *Which of the Powers does it represent?*

WRAGG. You've got him, Job! *Which of the Powers?*

DAFTY. The Powers Supernal.

HODGE. Never heard of them.

WRAGG. I have. They are on our side.

LIMP. Shut up! . . .

He again addresses DAFTY.

I perceive you are a faithful spy — diplomat, even! — You conceal your secrets by a jest. Did you find any more little jokes up there?

DAFTY. Five little ones. One screamer.

LIMP. And — the screamer?

DAFTY (*bowing*). The obligations of my Order will not yet permit me to announce it.

LIMP (*suavely*). Might we trouble you to regale us with the five?

DAFTY (*more so*). It will afford me infinite pleasure. In those dizzy altitudes I found the evil liver discomfitted and brought to naught. The gross heart given over to its own fatness. Envy and malice turned to suicidal dreams and foul inventions. Nations weighed in the balance and found wanting. Lastly, I found Darkness professing itself the Light; and the Light suffering it to be so for a season.
Do we get it over?

TRAIL *creeps to the fireplace on all fours, and crouches there, chewing his tail, contemplatively.*

Ah! . . .

TRAIL (*under his breath*). Weasel-eye!

HODGE. Here, let me come! Wait a moment! . . .
He winks violently at everybody, implying that he has a poser.

How did you manage that climb?

DAFTY. Don't wink so clamorously, Mr. Timothy. You've scared away the thunder.

HODGE. Eh? . . .

He gapes about him in meteorological amaze.

TRAIL (*as before*). That isn't funny!

DAFTY. As for that story you desire so eagerly, it has a double meaning. I fear, as a tired business man, you . . .

The sound of distant music arrests his attention.

Ah! — The Chopin Funeral March! I had that played over me, you know, when *I* . . . Pity, it's a bit too late!

WRAGG. It's eleven! That was the time. They'll be passing here in ten minutes.

DAFTY. *Ten* will do me nicely.

Something in his emphasis rivets them. The music melts away. There is heard only the far-off beating of the muffled drums.

Beautiful! . . .

LIMP. Never mind that infernal Memorial Service! Get on with your allegory!

DAFTY (*airily*). Ah, yes, my late ascension!

HODGE. Now for a whopper!

DAFTY. Whopper's the word, Mr. Timothy! I was never so thunderstruck in my life!

I don't know, lucrative sir, how far your studies may have led you into the Science of Optics. But the marvellous discovery I have just made in that realm of light up yonder . . .

HODGE. Hold on, now! Power and Light's my business, I'd have you know. Lucifer . . .

DAFTY. Ah, then you'll appreciate! My dear sir, you're bankrupt! Lucifer's bankrupt! That gigantic enterprise aloft there is about to revolutionize all earthly business!

HODGE. Impossible!

DAFTY. Supremely! — Simply cannot fail! I divined that, the moment I cleft the clouds.

HODGE. Yes, but how did you get there? That's what I want to know!

DAFTY. There's the point! — The Light! I connected with the very first gleam, and was transmitted in a twinkle.

HODGE. Course, I know Science can do very queer things. Why, in my own trade — you wouldn't believe! But there it is!

DAFTY (*urbanely*). The pragmatic proof, Mr. Timothy!

HODGE. Just what I always tell them! What I say is, with Science all things is possible. But some of these young fellows think they know everything! . . .

Course, if this discovery of yours has any substantial . . .

DAFTY. My dear sir, it's Substance Itself!

HODGE (*quickly*). I'll take an option on the first . . .

DAFTY *fixes a demonic gaze upon him.*

DAFTY. Gently, Mr. Timothy! The first shall be last, you know!

HODGE. Come now, we know all about that! — What's your game? Well? Spit it out!

DAFTY. I admit a difficulty. The necessary limitations of human spittle . . . Then, too, the

abstruse optics of it — metaphysics, even . . . You see, it isn't, as I at first conjectured, merely that *One* Eye! There are the others! Millions, quadrillions! The universe is swarming with them!

HODGE (*bewildered*). Millions of eyes?

DAFTY. Infinitudes! Peeping, spying, everywhere — eternally. We have dreamed ourselves unseen, hidden away, buried in the darkness of unfathomable graves! And all around us, that world of deathless light! Eyes! They are about us now! Their glances are a fusilade of gimlets!

JULIA. Eyes! You're mad! You lie!

DAFTY. Precisely my words, Ma'am! *Nicholas,* I said, *you're a liar, and the father of liars!* But we're wrong! Blasphemously, devilishly wrong. If there were to be any more time, I'd prove it! But there are only *seven* short minutes! . . .

She gasps, but he continues relentlessly.

We can't escape them, those formidable eyes! They crowd, they thicken upon us! Every moment! *You* can't escape them! You par-

ticularly can't! They are probing, pricking, piercing, stabbing to your very vitals!

JULIA. Oh! Horrible!

DAFTY. Oh, I don't know! Nice little eyes! And when one's motives are so blameless! . . .

HODGE (*dubiously*). What kind of things are they?

DAFTY. Inquisitive kind, Mr. Timothy. They search the deepest part of you! They search the very pockets! You might call them petty pilferers! Or again, policemen! Or even — angels! And microscopically small.

HODGE. Well, your ideas remind me . . .

DAFTY. Exactly! Out of the garnered treasures of your Baptist learning, you would recall that ancient gibe against the sacred teachings of Aquinas! Well, they *can!* Myriads of them can perch upon the point of a very small pin!

HODGE. Angels on a pin!

DAFTY. Listen! I'll demonstrate it, in precisely — *six* minutes time! Come, one last flutter before the aeons! How much will you bet?

HODGE. Bet! I'm a deacon!

DAFTY. Now, Mr. Timothy, be a sport!

HODGE. No, I'll be damned first!

DAFTY. That will be too late! By then . . .

WRAGG. Look here! Keep to the point! First, it's armies in the clouds: then, optics! You deliberately sweep aside . . .

DAFTY. Sweep aside! It's identically the same story!

WRAGG. Same story! What in the name of logic have optics to do with . . .

DAFTY. You amazing mole! How do you imagine the hosts of darkness and damnation are being dispersed? By *your* sharpshooting? Or by Living Eyes? Eyes are part of the battle yonder! Is it possible I am obscure? . . .

Come, let me amplify a little. There are yet — *five* minutes! Those Eyes . . .

LIMP. Oh, damn your Eyes!

DAFTY (*like a serpent*). Not mine exclusively, sir! They are at the service of the entire creation. Including if I mistake not — you! . . .

For LIMP *stands frozen, pierced as it were by instant icicles.* DAFTY *watches him a moment, and then says slowly.*

They search everybody.

The silence is broken only by the distant pulsing of the drums.

Don't they, Tommy?

TRAIL. They can search me!

They do: like red hot needles. He squirms.

JULIA (*passionately*). How do I know it's true? How do I know you are not lying?

DAFTY. What! Beginning to stab you, too?

She writhes beneath his gleaming eye.

HODGE. Look here! I'll take that bet!

DAFTY (*quickly*). How much can you shew?

HODGE. How much do you say?

DAFTY. How much have you got?

HODGE. I . . .

He claps his hand to his pocket, and pauses abruptly. The drums have never ceased.

Name yours!

DAFTY (*slowly*). Eternity.

HODGE. What's your joke?

DAFTY. *Four* minutes!

HODGE (*fiercely*). Name your figure!

DAFTY. You're a ready reckoner, Mr. Timothy. Multiply a myriad of angels by the number of pins you have saved; and divide everything you have stolen among the poor.

HODGE. That's queer arithmetic!

He calculates it, grasping at his heart. The drums are still beating.

WRAGG (*explosively*). What's the matter with flags, I'd like to know?

DAFTY. You, mainly, Pomeroy! You and Timothy.

WRAGG. And what about you?

DAFTY. I'm guarding them, if you only knew.

WRAGG (*bitterly*). I didn't start this. What of Julia?

DAFTY. She's dying.

HODGE (*similarly*). What of Job?

DAFTY. He's dead.

LIMP. Dead, am I? I'll shew you whether I . . .

DAFTY. Don't you know it? Or do you want more slaughter, to drive the lesson home?

LIMP. I . . .

DAFTY. *Three* minutes!

LIMP. I . . .

DAFTY. It has been a long debate, Sir Gentleman, notably contested. If you will pardon the pun — the Eyes have it!

And like a skilled fencer, in perfect form, he pinks him neatly in the brisket.

Sleep now, little weapon. Work's over.

He returns it gravely to its scabbard.

TRAIL. Ha! *Make*believe!

DAFTY (*esoterically*). Ah, it has another name for the initiate!

TRAIL. What?

DAFTY. Make*believe*.

HODGE. Sounds the same to me.

JULIA. After all, what is it? Just the weapon of a silly little child!

DAFTY. And you, a mother! That's all it has to be! My Golden One knows that.

LIMP *susurrates a last crumbling word.*

LIMP. And Timothy! And Pomeroy! Are they dead, also?

DAFTY. We shall learn, shortly. When the Conference sits.

HODGE *and* WRAGG *both whisper together.*

BOTH. Which Conference? . . .

DAFTY *does not answer. He is reckoning something.*

DAFTY. *Two!* . . .

The Funeral March is heard again, far off. But it is approaching nearer, every moment.

How are *you* getting on, Tommy?

TRAIL. Burning! . . .

DAFTY. The torments of the saints you slandered, Tommy!

TRAIL. Thirsty! . . .

DAFTY. The beer you libelled, Tommy! God's beautiful beer!

TRAIL. Stiff! . . .

DAFTY. Your lecherous ideas on dancing, Tommy! Legs, you know!

TRAIL. Ugliness! . . .

DAFTY. Your repudiation of art, theatres: your ghastly hymns!

TRAIL. Sticky! It's like molasses!

DAFTY. Home, sweet Home! Mother! Close the shutters, Willie's dead!

TRAIL. Bitterness! Black wrath curdling up out of the pit of my belly!

DAFTY. That's your god, Tommy! Vomit him, brother! And serve the Living Christ!

TRAIL (*utterly surprised*). But I do! I'm saved!

DAFTY. Not yet, Tommy. You don't know it; but you're in hell.

TRAIL (*growling*). What do you know about hell?

DAFTY. Why, Tommy, *you* savvy that! Don't I belong?

HODGE. One thing I've wanted to know for some time. Who are you?

DAFTY. An instrument. Optically speaking, the wrong end of the telescope. I'm that Other Side, you know: that Outer Darkness! — Only, of course, it's all One, really. Do I make myself — luciferous?

TRAIL. That's no answer. What's your name? Your family connections? How do you pass your time?

DAFTY. I'm the devil, Tommy. God's naughty brother. Passing from hell unto salvation.

TRAIL. Thirteenth century doctrine, I guess!

DAFTY. No, fourth, this time. And not a doctrine, Tommy! A pious opinion of the Fathers that composed the Creed. Ah! . . .

He is reckoning again. A long pause.

One! . . .

He stands at attention, ceremonially placing his closed fist to his brow. Then he speaks with intense solemnity.

Brethren and fellow sinners! My Illustrious and Sublime Grand Master bids me announce His last and greatest joke.

They gaze at him in deepest horror. Then they all gasp fearfully.

OMNES. What?

DAFTY. The Kingdom of Heaven.

They are all standing. The stillness of doom descends upon them. The Funeral March swells to a reverberant roar, as the procession passes by the Orphanage. The sound decreases.

Miss Bliss *appears below the Window of the Angel of the Resurrection. She is like a girl, glorious with immortal youth. Her eyes flame miracles of radiant joy; her dark hair streaming loosely from her, as though blown by some unearthly wind. She is clad in robes of the blessed resurrection, and bears in her hand a small lamp burning.*

She descends half way down the stairway.

Bliss. Awake! Awake! Awake, ye dreaming dead! He is come! His chariots are thundering at the gates! The long dark night is passing away! It is morning! He is making all things new! Ye dead, awake! Awake! . . .

The music crashes into triumph, and wails away again.

The kingdoms of this world and the glories of them are no more! They are cast down, they are demolished, they are utterly overthrown! And in the place that knew them, there is risen the Empire of the Lord our God! *Gloria in excelsis!* . . .

The mourners shall no longer weep! He shall

wipe away all tears! Lo, the mighty hosts and the multitudes of them, numberless, with banners streaming! He is the resurrection and the life immortal! *Gloria! Gloria!* . . .

The labourer shall no longer eat his bread in bitterness! He shall toil for very sweetness of man's joy therein; and he shall gather where he sowed; and none shall say him nay! Beauty shall abound; and in the hearts of all men, deathless love! *Gloria! Gloria!* . . .

The pomp and blasphemy of ruthless war is done away! It whirls to dust, it sobs into oblivion like a shuddering wind! The swords are broken! The plough-shares are at the beating! *Gloria in excelsis Deo!* And on earth — Peace! . . .

The music now comes rattling through the Hall like thunder.

Crumble, ye sepulchres! Break through your prison-bars, ye living dead! Cleanse you of your sin! Put away from you the accursed thing! The Lord is at hand! Arise and meet Him! Lazarus, I say! Lazarus, come forth!

The music cracks suddenly, like a heart in mid-throbbing. From it there emerges one clear note of seraphic

sweetness, long continued. It grows in volume.

A flood of sunshine pours in from the eastern window, bathing the Hall in light. Up in the Gothic arches, like winged cherubim, there are fluttering beams. The Window of the Angel of the Resurrection becomes a blaze of everlasting gold.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

THE END OF THE PLAY

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